eyes curiously upon it, but said nothing. She continued—

"But God be praised, the voice of my heart at length spoke audibly to my mind. I repented me, in season, of the terrible thought. I thrust the deadly purpose from my soul. I flung the poisoned liquid from my hands almost as soon as I had mixed it. I hurried to yonder window, and emptied the bottle into the garden. Then, beside this couch, I threw myself upon my knees, and implored the blessed Virgin for succor to banish all such feelings from my breast. I found the requisite strength in prayer. Never again did I harbor a sinful purpose against him. Never did a hair of his head come to harm through me."

"Then what have you to fear, dear Marie; and with what, above all, can your husband now reproach you?"

"Alas! dear Frederick, who shall say when he is received to mercy—when he is acquitted of his guilt—and when his penance shall suffice for atonement?"

"Marie, this argument is not your own?"

"I confess it. It is the suggestion of Father Paulo."

Brandon smiled slightly, quietly remarking—

"It struck me as coming from a theologian."

She proceeded—

"But it was the assurance of Col. de Berniere, himself, that other sacrifices were required at my hands before my atonement could be complete! This is the decree which is brought, referring to the awful crime which I meditated against him. For this, it is

required that I should deny you now—deny myself—and rather shroud myself in a convent, devoted to God, than to think of any other human love!"

"Ha! Impossible! How know you, Marie, that this Egyptian was a spectre—that he was—?"

"Alas, Frederick! did he not show me those awful features, but too well remembered, at once of death and life?—features known too soon, and feared too long, to be easily forgotten? Besides, Frederick, did he not unveil to me my own terrible secret—the meditated crime, which was to precipitate him from life to judgment, and which my lips had never before confided to any mortal keeping?"

She paused, and sank back upon the couch exhausted. Brandon again rose from his seat and paced the apartment in silence.

"You are sure, Marie," after a pause, "that you never once breathed this secret to any ear?"

"Oh, sure! Oh, sure! It was too terrible! And now—"

Brandon approached and whispered to her. She answered quickly—

"Ah! that was sin upon sin! I reserved that from all the rest."

She would have continued, but he arrested her.

"No more on this point, Marie; I have a reason for it."

She remained silent, and he continued to pace the floor; his eye seeming to wander about the chamber in a manner which at length struck the attention of Marie de Berniere, and filled her with new anxieties.

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THE MAROON;

A

LEGEND OF THE CARIBBEES,

AND

OTHER TALES.

BY W. GILMORE SIMMS,

Author of "The Yemassee." "Guy Rivers," "Wood Craft," &c. &c. &c.

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MARIE DE BERNIERE;

A TALE OF THE CRESCENT CITY.

CHAPTER I.

THE FRIENDS—FIRST VISIT TO THE CRESCENT CITY.

It was in the winter of —— (it does not matter about the year) that I made my first visit to the Crescent City, as New Orleans has been fancifully and felicitously called. It was not then the wondrous business metropolis that we now behold it; but sufficiently stately, magnificent, and populous, even then, to turn the head of a simple backwoodsman like myself. Until that period, I had never beheld a city deserving of the name—had never, in fact, been much beyond the little village, in West Tennessee, which constituted the nearest market-town to my father's plantation. In brief, I was but a humble rustic, without any of the advantages of travel, and but few of education. Thus ignorant, at eighteen years of age, I descended the Mississippi to the queen of cities, seated at its mouth. I had for a companion, on this expedition, a young friend, something older than my-

self, however, who, besides, had enjoyed a much larger experience. Frederick Brandon was a Tennessean also. He had seen something of our American world—had been once among the Eastern States and cities, and had passed more than once before over the route which we now pursued. He knew every headland, every plantation, and, as it seemed to me, every person along the river. He was about five years my senior, and had been better taught than myself in almost every possible respect. I necessarily deferred to him; I was pleased and proud to do so. I had every confidence in his affection, and his superior knowledge and judgment, and felt that he could enlighten me on a thousand subjects, of which my information was distressingly small. He was the person to do so without mortifying my self-esteem, having as little vanity and arrogance as I ever met in any person whose claims were so considerable. To him, New Orleans was no novelty, though always a great attraction. He had a sister who had been married some seven years before to a wealthy Creole of the city, and frequent visits, and an occasional residence with her, had made all its places familiar. He was the man, over all others, to spy out all the secrets and explore all the haunts of a great metropolis. He possessed a lively curiosity, with an unexcitable temperament—a rather rare combination—and was prompt and active always, without showing either eagerness or hurry. His nerves seemed to be wrought of steel. Sternly resolute, even as a gladiator, he was yet not easily ruffled. A man of great muscular power, he

was yet slow to anger, and preferred always, where this was possible, to excuse or to escape annoyance, rather than, with unnecessary haste, to construe it into an impertinence, which no person was more ready to resent. With this temperament, at once cool and curious, New Orleans had few mysteries which he had not contrived to penetrate. Its walks and *cafés*, its theatres and hells—for at this period the Crescent City could boast of quite a number of licensed gaming establishments of the most gigantic dimensions—were all familiar to his footsteps. He seemed everywhere to carry with him that spell of character, which is an *open sesame*, throwing wide to the seeker every avenue to the most secret recesses of social morals and of the practices which mostly tend to lay bare, and render active the secret susceptibilities and propensities of the erring nature. Not that he himself was either dissipated or vicious. On the contrary, he never played, and was singularly temperate in all his indulgences. I look back after a lapse of near thirty years upon his character, as I knew it, with almost the same degree of admiration now, which I felt for him at first. His powers of caution, of circumspection rather, of endurance, resistance, and subjectivity, were indeed wonderful; and it is to their influence I owe it, that I so soon learned to navigate the mysterious avenues, and penetrate the doubtful abodes of the great city, without suffering from its snares and pitfalls. I could tell some queer stories about our desultory wanderings and strange discoveries—but these may serve a turn hereafter. Let it answer now,

that, in the course of a few weeks, I had acquired such a perfect *carte du pays* of the municipal and social world into which I had thus, for the first time, penetrated, that I too might have taken up the business of the *cicerone*, in the goodly city, without greatly discrediting my master.

CHAPTER II.

SOCIETY IN NEW ORLEANS—NEW PARTIES.

Through Brandon's sister, Madame de Chateauneuve, I obtained my *entrée* to society. By this word society, however, must be understood that only of the *Creole* or *native* population at that early day in New Orleans, when the city numbered some thirty-five thousand people only. Scarcely any other social world was recognized. The Anglo-American population were neither sufficiently numerous, nor in sufficiently good repute, to form an extensive or an ample community of their own. The Gallic-American circles were not easily accessible. They were composed of a proud aristocratic people, possessed of an equal share of jealousies and refinements. They regarded the Anglo-Americans as mere intruders—adventurers by no means representing the better classes of their people—traders equally unpolished and reckless, having no aims that did not lie within the narrow compass of the sovereign dollar! They despised them accordingly; and soon learned to detest, even as cordially

as they despised, when they found these adventurers, as competitors, in trade, unrestrained by the conventions of a customary society, undiverted from the one purpose by any sense of grace and luxury, and whose superior energies—the result, in some measure, of their deficient refinements and inferior tastes—were rapidly undermining their prosperity, and wresting from them hourly the profits of a trade which the Creole had rather carried on as an amateur than as a professor.

It would not, I think, be easy to understand, at this latter day—now that everything is somewhat altered in these respects—the wholesale aversion with which the natives of Louisiana, at that period, regarded the strange population. They made some distinction, it is true, between members of the same race, engaged in agriculture, and those employed in trade, which were greatly favorable to the former class. Thus, as I was the son of a planter, and destined to become a planter myself, I was necessarily recognized as a gentleman—though still after the Anglo-Saxon formulæ. It did not matter that my planting interest was a petty one. It was quite sufficient that its tendencies were recognized as calculated to raise the social nature, and elevate the tastes of the individual to a rank very far superior to those which were usually ascribed to trade.

In consequence of this distinction, my social position was freed from the usual disabilities of my race in New Orleans, and Madame de Chateauneuve kindly achieved the rest. She found for me a sufficient pass-

port. Under her wing, I went the visiting rounds, and became incorporated with that circle in which she moved without impediment. She was a calm, strong-minded person, very much resembling her brother; and, like a sensible woman, she swayed her husband's household, without mortifying his *amour propre.*

Monsieur Philip de Chateauneuve was a merchant of the *old school*—a class, by the way, quite as well known to the history of trade among the English, as among their Gallic neighbors. He was a large importer of French and German wines, and was properly interested in his business, without suffering his appetite for gain to render him heedless of the demands of society—a nice and difficult distinction which the Anglo-American has yet justly to appreciate. He contrived, in other words, to maintain together the character of the trader and the gentleman—was contented with moderate profits and a moderate business, and did not fancy that his sole destination in life lay in his day-book and ledger. He was thus enabled to devote some time and study to literature and the fine arts, of which he was passionately fond; and his collection, though on a small scale, would have refreshed the connoisseur, as his gallery was not more *petit* than *recherche.* He had some pictures, picked up during a twelvemonth's visit to the continent of Europe, and a correspondence with friendly amateurs in Italy, which he had been careful to nurse and keep alive. Monsieur de Chateauneuve was considerably older than his wife, whom he professed to treat rather as a

child than a woman. To all this she yielded with a deference seemingly the most implicit, being quite satisfied to wield the essentials of power, without disputing about its shows. Her brother was quite a favorite with her Baron, and in some degree I succeeded, after a season, to his favor also. But these details are unnecessary. Enough, that the freedom of his house afforded me that of several of the oldest native families, the very families, representing an order of things rapidly dying out, but which, in numberless respects, deserved to survive their disabilities, which, of all things, I should have most desired.

With a very slight smattering of French, which was sufficiently imperfect to encourage my friends to correct me graciously—a task which my fair companions always performed in such a manner as to make the correction agreeable—I made my way into society with tolerable success. Though something of a rustic, I was lively and good-natured, and my equal simplicity and animation were serviceable to me in a condition of the social world which if highly sophisticated, had never yet lost its frankness. I flattered myself that I grew rather popular, and Brandon assured me that such was the case. Invitations, accordingly, poured in upon, and kept me busy. An incessant round of parties—morning, noon, and evening reunions—made me something of a gallant; and I, who had lately worn moccasons and leggings, was now well satisfied to believe that I had never danced in anything more grotesque than French opera boots, and Poniatowski pumps!

One delightful morning in January found Frederick Brandon and myself eagerly engaged in discussing our habits for the *bal masque* of Madame Marie de Berniere. This lady was a *belle* and a fortune. She was the youthful widow of the once notorious Col. Eugene de Berniere, a sugar planter and a famous swordsman. He was one of a school now nearly extinct, who prided himself on his reputation as a fire-eater. He had been emphatically *un mauvais sujet*, one of the most malignant of a tribe whose malignity assumed a type of fanaticism little short of insanity, and who seemed anxious to distinguish themselves by a sort of general warfare against humanity. A fierce, dark, savage man, ungenial and morose, he had been a domestic tyrant, and was equally feared by his family, and loathed by society, which he nevertheless contrived to bully into the appearance of respect and certainly into forbearance.

Marie Prideau, now de Berniere, was some twenty years younger than himself. She had been forced into his arms when but a child of sixteen, by the perverse avarice of her needy mother, who very soon learned to deplore the folly of which she had been guilty, the cruel fruits of which she was yet not compelled in her own person to endure. These enured wholly to the unhappy victim, her daughter. Col. de Berniere soon taught her an experience in torture which might have afforded some lessons to the Spanish Inquisition, in the day of its maturer tyrannies. He soon grew jealous of the fidelity of the beautiful creature delivered into his hands, assured as he was,

by the infallible convictions of his nature, that there was nothing in himself at all calculated to secure or influence her affections. But his jealousy was wholly without cause.

The virtues of Marie de Berniere were beyond reproach. Her prudence, however, was at fault. Of a high spirit, a frank and ardent temper, she could not conceal the disgust and aversion which his brutalities provoked. His treatment of her was harsh and brutal, amounting at times to violence; and his death, which happened suddenly, was a grateful relief from the most cruel of all bonds. She felt it so, and affected none of the regrets which she could not be supposed to feel. She was at no great pains to convince the world that she was unconsolable; still, she offended against none of the proprieties. She clad herself and household in the usual habits of mourning. She abstained from the gayer circles of society; she violated none of its rules; and her conduct was held not merely unexceptionable, but, among those who knew her history, exemplary in a high degree. And thus she continued till the period of our narrative.

It was now nearly two years since the death of her tyrant. Her weeds were all discarded; she had resumed her place in society, and was now preparing to give her first grand entertainment. All the world, to employ the superlative idiom of the French, was agog for the occasion. They knew her story; they felt her charms; they had not forgotten the great wealth, which the sudden death of her husband, without heirs, had secured without restraint to herself.

The public mind was greatly excited, and indulged in glowing expectations. Conjecture and rumor were busy in describing, in language the most exaggerated, the delights and glories which we might anticipate. The young widow was about to revenge herself for her long forbearance; and the prediction was confident and universal that we were soon to enjoy a festival more brilliant, picturesque, and charming than had been seen for many years before in our American Paris. Great preparations for the event were known to be in progress, and all the auguries were propitious and all the prophecies were grateful. Anticipation, however, if I may dare to say so, did not go quite far enough. The spectacle may have had a self-exaggerating effect in eyes which, like mine, had not been familiar with such displays, and which, accordingly, were without the just standards for determining upon them, but there is still a considerable circle in the Crescent City, as it was some thirty years ago, who will long remember the *bal masque* of Madame de Berniere, not less from what actually took place, than by what was so glowingly promised to public expectation.

CHAPTER III.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BAL MASQUE—EXPECTATIONS.

I NEED not shame to say that the event, the anticipations of which had occasioned such a complete *bouleversement* among the fashionables of New Orleans, turned my head also. I was an eager boy; this was my first appearance on such a scene, and I was in a tumult of pleasurable excitement. I had heard of the masked balls among the Europeans—of their motley crowds, their wild splendor, their ever-changing aspects and ever-fruitful provocations to pleasure; the humors which they elicited, the curious blunders which they occasioned and developed; their dramatic *éclaircissement*—the felicitous fancies and unique tastes which made their inimitable contrast; the merriment and wit which flowed or flashed in the keen encounter of well-chosen characters; and more than all, the romance of their intrigues, and the results, as grateful to the heart as to the fancy, which sometimes sprung from the happy exhibitions which they made equally of heart and fancy.

These were my thoughts and dreams, leading me to the encouragement of the wildest expectations, far beyond the possibility even of what I was really to enjoy. The romance of the thing appealed to an imagination only too eager and impetuous, always and forever on the wing. That indescribable halo with

which the fancy invests the creature of the hope or the thought, far beyond anything in the capacity of man to realize, had borne me aloft into that ideal land of anticipation, where all the aspects that encounter us are of such stuff only as make the visions of the inexperienced boy. But the human sense was present, to give body to the glad and wandering sentiment. To confess a truth, I had some vague notions of personal adventure; of some romantic encounter with beauty in a disguise which I was decreed to penetrate—beneath which I was to discover charms, and sensibilities, and affections, which were to be the more valuable as they had already learned to find a value in myself. In brief, I was to be made happy by a happy conquest. Oh dreams! dreams! But not the less precious that they are nothing more.

CHAPTER IV.

BRANDON'S PASSION.

BRANDON had his expectations, also, not less pleasant than mine, and resting on far better foundations. He did not withhold them from me, though he revealed them now for the first time. His were hopes and expectations, rather than mere dreams. That portion of my romance which ensued from the mystery, did not belong to his calculations. These he did not suppress. He had a passion actively working in his heart, the object of which was no less a person than

the fair widow herself. Of her he had never spoken to me before; and her home was almost the only one, of all within the range of his sister's circle, into which I had not gone in his company. But he had gone thither alone. This he now revealed to me. He had long known her, and had loved her even before the death of her husband. Speaking of him, he had but a single word—"Brute!" which he repeated with singular emphasis. From him I now received her story. Brandon then revealed to me his own relations with the widow.

"If woman," said he, "were always her own mistress—were she not too commonly influenced by what is called the world, and what she considers its friendships—I might easily persuade myself to indulge in a hope which might seem to others unbecoming. But to you, William, I frankly say that, if I do not greatly deceive myself, I *have* a place in Marie's heart. I loved her when she was the wife of another, though I knew not the fact myself. Then I saw her but infrequently, and we had no opportunities for speech together. But she must even then have seen the earnestness with which I watched her; and I have a thousand times fancied since, when endeavoring to recall the past, that her eye, even then, frequently distinguished me from among the crowd. Since she has opened her doors to society, I have availed myself of my sister's intimacy, to see her frequently. We have also met when none were present; and I feel my advances have not been made in vain. I confess to you

frankly, that I love her beyond any woman I have ever yet beheld."

"But how will you overcome the difficulty in regard to religion? I heard your sister last night say, that she was something of a devotee—quite a wild spiritualist, and a little too much under the influence of her ghostly father."

"She is spiritual only because she is imaginative. She is religious and a devotee, only because hers is a very earnest and enthusiastic nature. Her religion, I fancy, will be no difficulty with me, if mine should suggest none to her. She is a Catholic, and I, if anything, am an Episcopalian. There are really no vital differences between the two creeds, except in respects which rather concern society than the individual. The great effort of Protestantism in England was rather to strip the state of its religion, than the man. In that country, now, the established church is simply an instrument of state, one of the political agencies for the maintenance of a system. I am tolerant. I do not feel that my faith has any right to quarrel with the forms of another, which admits her to be pure, fond, and faithful, simply because it obeys certain prescriptive modes in its exhibition. My wife may pray at any altar that she pleases, so that she really does pray, and always puts me forward in her prayers. For me, I think it likely she will suffer me to worship where I please, always provided that I make no other living woman my madonna."

I laughed. I had no doubt of his success, and I told him so. I felt sure that few women could with-

stand him. Few men were in possession of more decided or superior attractions. Something has already been said of his character. His personal claims were not a whit behind those of his intellect. A more manly fellow never left the mountains of Tennessee. A more graceful person never trod in the palaces of nobility. Brave, generous, and frank—a splendid rider, a famous wrestler, a deadly shot—he had yet other attractions. He could pace a galliard like a prince, and hold his ground with Hoyle and Phillidor at whist and chess. Besides, his literary tastes had been cultivated, and were of a decided character. His information was large, and of that sort which society most needs and most desires. He could suggest a plan for draining a meadow, reclaiming a desert, improving a crop, and designing a cottage; and, without obtruding his art, he could frame a sonnet to a sentiment, or compose the song for a favorite strain of summer music. It is true that Frederick Brandon had little wealth; but what of this, if that of Marie de Berniere could suffice for both? I felt sure, and spoke confidently of his success. He heard me patiently.

"I do not certainly underrate my hopes," said he; "but I am very sure that I do not overrate my fears. I foresee much difficulty before me, from a cause which is scarcely visible to you; nor can I now explain it myself. Enough, that I have a severe struggle before me, which will test all my strength and ingenuity. But hither comes my sister. Not a word more. Let us look now at the visors."

CHAPTER V.

MADAME DE BERNIERE.

THAT very morning, under the auspices of Madame de Chateauneuve, I made my first visit to the lovely Marie de Berniere. She received us very graciously, and was, I fancied, particularly solicitous of the favorable regards of Madame de C. Nor had I any reason to complain. Benevolence and sweetness were apparently the most distinguishing traits in her composition; and she very soon put me quite at ease beside her. When I left her, I felt as if she were an old acquaintance. I have said that Marie de Berniere was a *belle*. She deserved to be so, and would have had friends in spite of all her fortune. She was but twenty-two at the time of which I write, and possessed all the frankness, the delicacy, and freshness of a girl of seventeen; with the additional advantages of a contemplative mood derived from a premature experience. Never did a more beautiful or princely creature glide through the measured majesty of dance. Her form was rather above the middling size, but eminently symmetrical. Her carriage was at once dignified and unaffected. So much grace and simplicity, with so much elevation and nobility, were never before united in the same person. Her features were by no means regular. Regularity of features, indeed, is seldom consistent with real or remarkable beauty—but hers

were so perfect in themselves, and each so perfect by itself, that their combined expression was irresistible, and readily served to divert the eye from any too close analysis of details, which might have resulted in an unfavorable decision upon the whole. In brief, you were touched, and made to sympathize with the object, before you could begin its study, and then all farther examination was prosecuted under a bias which left the judgment no longer free. You were not allowed to perceive a deficiency in charms which had already dazzled the glance and warmed the fancy; and the mind yielded with the eye, and the heart submitted at the first summons, to a nameless influence which was sufficient to prejudice, in its behalf, the severest purpose of the critic. Such was the effect of the beauty of Marie de Berniere on most persons. In this way, perhaps, had it won the young admiration of my companion. He admitted that he had yielded without resistance, at a mere glance, when he first came to New Orleans; but he insisted that the first impressions of his eye had been confirmed by the subsequent experience of his mind. We shall see. At all events, I was not prepared, or indeed, at all disposed, to question the propriety of his feelings or the wisdom of his tastes. My first interview with the beautiful widow awakened in my own heart a warm and genial attachment for her; not of love, remember, but of such a kind as to make it easy to understand how it should be love in the bosom of my friend. Still, I am disposed to think that, prudent and cool in all other matters, Frederick Brandon had hurried

into this attachment with all the impulse of the boy, just freed from the leash at twenty-one. All men have their rashnesses, and this was his. Admitting all the charms of Marie de Berniere, there were some peculiarities about her that never entirely satisfied myself.

These, I was more sensible of, during a quiet evening at Madame de Chateauneuve's mansion, preceding by a few days the *bal masque*, and where I saw her for the second time. On this occasion, I studied her with much more freedom and particularity than before. That she was a person of many and imposing beauties, such as must infallibly make themselves admired and soon beloved by thousands, almost at a glance, I could easily perceive and will cheerfully admit. It was the style and manner of her beauty that did not satisfy me—that startled me, in fact, and made me to fear, in some degree, as well as to admire. I felt that there was something unnaturally powerful in the very intensity of her glance. Nothing could have been more brilliant than her eye. But it was fascination, no less than splendor. The effect was rather to dazzle and confound, than to persuade. If it had the brilliancy of the diamond—its purity and clearness—it seemed to possess its hardness also. The lady had a habit of looking on you, fixedly, into your very eye—a habit which very seldom pleases or attracts; her own glittering all the while, with a piercing shaft-like directness, of the intensity of which she seemed to be nearly entirely unconscious. It happened, not unfrequently, while she was thus

looking through you, as it were, that your remarks would utterly fail to fix her thoughts or command her attention. Her mind seemed, at such moments, to be wandering; her faculties absorbed in musings and contemplations as widely remote from what you were saying, and even from yourself, as if she were wholly in another world and presence; and when, by an evident effort of will, she would recall her consciousness to the things about her, it was with a seeming restlessness of mood that robbed the features, for awhile, of all expression. These were peculiarities which I did not conceive to be pleasant ones. There was yet another. There was a something in the occasional quivering of her thin lips, which produced an uncomfortable sensation; and she had a habit of drawing in her breath, at moments of pause, in the conversation, with a slight sobbing sound, such as an infant gives out after having cried itself to sleep. This was another peculiarity which, I confess, tended somewhat to qualify my admiration of her charms. They seemed to be so many proofs of an hysterical tendency, and to betray, also, the weight of some secret sorrow or anxiety, which we do not relish should appear conspicuous in the case of youth and feminine beauty. I doubt whether Frederick Brandon perceived these peculiarities at all, or they may have seemed to him only so many additional beauties.

Of her features a brief sketch will suffice. Her hair was of a light brown; her eye was hazel; her complexion dazzlingly fair, and distinguished by the most delicate peach-blossom that ever kindled the

virgin cheek to loveliness. Never was mouth more sweetly yet expressively fashioned. Her nose was Grecian; the eye large and eminent; the chin full, but delicately rounded; the forehead high rather than massive; the neck long and white, arching beautifully, and the throat broad and very fair, and worthy of the well-fashioned bust from which it rose. Of her figure and carriage I have spoken.

Such was the result of my observations during my second interview with Madame de Berniere. They must not be thought unfavorable. Perhaps I sought for defects, in order to prevent myself from becoming too much pleased. I must add that, personally, I had no reason to be less satisfied with her on this than on the previous occasion. Her attention to me was quite as friendly as before. She evidently treated me with special favor; and I was not vain enough to ascribe this treatment to any cause but the high degree of favor which my friend enjoyed in her estimation. But, let us hurry; the masquerade approaches.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BAL MASQUE—THE TWO EGYPTIANS.

THE *bal masque* might well have been a native of the Crescent City. It is here more at home than in any other portion of the Union. Here it belongs to the original sources of society—the creation of a Provençal and Andalusian parentage. It accords with

the flexible mood of the people, their social readiness, the felicity of their humor, its play, and liveliness. It is also characteristic of a nature that loves to turn aside to regions of its own, to dream, and indulge in fanciful wanderings. It is grateful to the South; it belongs to starlight and flowers, and appeals to tastes and sensibilities, which, in consequence of the very intensity of the native passions, prefers to disguise the over-earnest impulses, and to mask from exposure the too eager susceptibilities. That it is a dangerous recreation, as calculated to promote intrigue, is perhaps only true of it among a colder and more calculating people. I doubt if it is employed for any such purpose in New Orleans. It is simply one of the sports which constitute the romance of society, and divert it from its passions. It belongs rather to the play of the people than to their appetites. It brings out ingenious resource in conversation; exercises the subtleties of small social diplomacy; enables a bashful lover, perhaps, to declare, under a monk's visage, what he would not venture beneath his own; but seldom goes a fraction farther. It is the colder and more deliberate nature that plans and contrives such an agency for the promotion of more dangerous and deeper purposes; a prurient and vicious mind, that forever broods over its mere appetites; nursing, by means of thought, those characteristics which properly belong only to the sanguine impulses. The passions of the warm South, once aroused, would break through and fling aside all disguises. It cannot often employ hypocrisy for the purposes of passion;

and is as far as possible from any cold calculations in respect to it. These belong really to regions where the blood is never too warm for the control of the intellect; and where, accordingly, the intellect itself is made use of to stimulate the ardor and the fervor of the blood.

But a truce to these preliminaries. Let it suffice that the *bal masque* of Madame de Berniere was one of the most splendid affairs that had ever taken place in New Orleans. It was decidedly beyond anything that I had ever dreamed of as likely to occur in our time and country. It realized all my fancies of what might happen in foreign lands, where wealth, art, taste, and luxury combine for the gratification of the senses and the delight of the imagination.

The mansion of Madame de Berniere was a huge antique double establishment, situated in the *rue de* ——, the "court" precinct in the old French city. Its dimensions were sufficiently ample even for the vast entertainment which it now afforded.

We came at an early hour. The place was illuminated gloriously, from basement to attic; the lights disposed in wreaths, in stars, in crescents, upon the windows, making deep night in that narrow street emulous of noonday. The long treble line of carriages which filled the avenue, even at the early hour of our coming, declared, as certainly as any other sign, the sensation which the affair had occasioned among the ancient aristocracy of this the American Paris. The broad passage-way, through which the dwelling was entered, was crowded ere we came; and

it required a struggle to secure ingress, through the multitude. I was dazzled and bewildered, and but for Madame de Chateauneuve, must have been lost. What with the glance of lights, the confusion of tongues, the splendor and variety of costumes, the blaze of jewels, and the frequent bursts of a full and noble orchestra, I was completely taken from my feet. My eyes wandered from subject to subject, with an absolute consternation. I began to fancy myself in some famous European palace, amongst crowned heads and nobility. There they were, looking like the life. There were kings and princes; popes and cardinals; dukes, and lords, and knights; jongleurs and troubadours; Cleopatra, with her basket of asps and apples; Anne Bullen, followed by the headsman, and a wondrous array of other famous individual characters from the days of Solomon to those of Louis Quatorze, and later. But mine is not a catalogue, and the reader must conceive for himself the assortment of distinguished personages, such as would be likely to make their appearance on an occasion so grateful to aristocracy.

We struggled as we could, through the dense and shifting masses, until we reached the *dais* of reception, where, until a certain hour—until the guests, in fact, were all assembled—our fair hostess sat in a modest state, unmarked, and in ordinary ball costume. Here, in simplest white, with one pale rose just blossoming in her hand, Marie de Berniere shone as a star of the first magnitude. I had the honor to present Madame Chateauneuve, while Frederick Brandon followed us.

I felt very much like falling upon one knee, as to royalty, and making my profound obeisance to the beautiful sovereign, who, looking so much like Una, the mistress of the snow-white lamb, as described by Spenser, seemed to be now entirely without defect—a perfect creature of delight. Her beauty, I confess, at this moment, seemed completely pure, and without qualification. She was really in her element.

What was the delight of my friend, I could readily conjecture, though I am sure, even had his visor been lifted, that no one could have suspected the fervor of his fancy, or the depth of his attachment, in that calm white brow, and that sweet repose and gentle satisfaction which rayed out modestly from his great blue eyes. I watched both the parties as he drew nigh to make his bow, and fancied that the smile with which she welcomed him was one of peculiar indulgence. That she knew all of us, though we came in character and masks, was the natural consequence of the arrangement for the ball, by which she possessed an advantage over all her guests. It was one of the modes adopted for securing the company from the intrusion of improper or uninvited persons, that each expected guest was required to apprize her of the costume in which they would appear. His card, with her signature, could alone secure admission to the mansion, which was guarded by a strong police of *gens d'armes*.

This plan gave her a key to all the characters present; and I could see that her eye lingered earnestly upon the erect form of my friend, shrouded as it was

in the flowing garments of the Egyptian magian. But we were compelled to give place to other personages.

The preliminaries of reception may have consumed an hour, when, without signal, Madame Marie de Berniere disappeared from the circle, in which all was now life and animation. When she again returned, it was only to be lost among the thousand masks of which nothing could be known except by conjecture. The music timed all our proceedings, whether we danced, walked, or took refreshments. We had a numerous range of apartments on an upper and a lower floor. A piazza in the rear of the building was inclosed with canvas, artfully arrayed with festoons and flowers, and draped with shawls and curtains. This, in turn, conducted, by a flight of steps, into the loveliest court, where every variety of flower and shrub was congregated to give softness and sweetness to the scene. In that warm latitude, even in February, it was sometimes pleasant to glide into the cool porches, and inhale the fresh breathings from the cisterns of the night. All was privilege and pleasure, within the bounds of propriety and taste. Now we grew together in groups, interested by the attractive and spirited dialogue of masks which were doing more than common justice to the characters they had assumed; and now we lingered over the prophecies of some saucy gypsy, who used truth like a winged arrow —as, by the way, it always is —sure to hit some bosom, however randomly sent; and now we followed, laughingly, after the ludicrous antics of some clever

Arlecchino, who might have earned his bread in Italy where his art is more native than with us.

It was not long before, on every hand, the usual silly preliminary of "I know you!" had given way to settled dialogue, and, if the phrase be not an absurdity, of *serious* conversation. The groups were now pretty much broken up into pairs, each drawing aside with him that mask which promised him most pleasure, most excited his curiosity, or most gratified his vanity. Of my own adventures and successes I shall say but little. It needs not even be told in what costume I appeared on this to me the most memorable of all my social experiences. My fortune, I must admit, was neither a very promising nor highly prominent one. I may have flirted with a maid of honor, or fancied that I felt a more than usual interest in a Sicilian shepherdess—or squeezed, more tenderly than was prudent, the fingers of a Hebrew damsel who sighed over her virginity in the character of Jephtha's daughter. You may conjecture what you please. I shall make no confessions. It is my friend's story, not my own, which I have promised you, and we shall soon get to that. Certain it is, that for my own part the proceedings were by no means satisfactory. I had my *vis-à-vis*, true—and changed her, often enough; more frequently, perhaps, than was complimentary to her or profitable to myself; but I made no conquests, and escaped scot-free myself. I strove, but did not succeed, in persuading any of them to remove their masks, though but for an instant, and was rather fatigued than satisfied, long before anybody else was *ennuyée*.

Such, however, was far from being the case with Frederick Brandon. He came to me a little after midnight. The clocks throughout the house had all been silenced; and, half wearied, I was stealing a glance at my watch concealed within the folds of my vest, when he laid his hand upon my arm. I turned, with a guilty consciousness, and he saw what I was doing.

"Fie!" said he, "looking at your watch. What a barbarian—what a Tennessean! Beware, you must not suffer our hostess to see you at such a provincialism."

"She! Where is she? In what habit?"

"Hush! She is not far off! See there—there, as Zenobia. Is she not a queenly creature?"

"She is, indeed."

"How the habit suits her! She approaches."

At these words, Frederick turned, and advanced towards her. She took his arm promptly, as soon as offered, and they disappeared among the groups. This proceeding spoke favorably for my friend's success. It would seem that they understood each other. I followed their forms with my eyes, until a group of masks, loud in merriment, drew nigh, and I shrunk back from their clamors, into the recess of a window half shrouded by rich curtains of blue and crimson. There I threw myself upon a pile of cushions, gradually losing myself in reverie; in great degree unseen myself, yet able to see every passing costume. While I mused, a shadow filled the space. I looked up and saw the Egyptian habit of my friend.

"Ah, Frederick! So soon returned?" Such were my words, to which he gave me no answer; but, wheeling quietly about, he turned away. I rose to follow, intending to say that I was really monstrous weary, and meant to seek out his sister, in the hope to find her similarly disposed to escape; but, just then, a huge peasant woman of Savoy, followed by an officer of the "Old Guard," with a long train at their heels, interposed, and arrested my progress. Before I could extricate myself from this multitude, my Egyptian had disappeared. I had just given up the pursuit, and was turning again to my recess and cushions, when I was surprised to find him at my elbow.

He came forward hurriedly, and from a different quarter of the apartment from that where I had lost him. I plucked him by the sleeve.

"This time I have you! Well—you have been with her, and, let me say, you seem to understand each other. Is it so? Does she smile?"

"Truly," said he; and I could see that he spoke with a slight agitation of manner which was quite unusual with him. "Truly, she does. I have gained something; but, just now, there's a curious mistake which has taken place, and which troubles both of us. Do not be out of the way, William; I may need your assistance."

He disappeared at these words, but soon returned, when I gathered from him the following strange particulars. He had joined Madame de Berniere, as I had seen, on his first leaving me, and they had retired into an alcove together. There, she had proceeded, as

if resuming a conversation which had been interrupted. What she said was of a character particularly interesting and grateful to my friend. Her remarks—her manner of uttering them—and the nature of the communication, were such as to impress him with the conviction that she entertained the most lively interest in himself and fortunes. All this was grateful enough. But there was this one difficulty about the matter, which struck and staggered Brandon, and it was that what she said indicated a foregone conclusion, and seemed to have reference to some recent dialogue which had already taken place between the parties. Her remarks, in fact, were so many responses;—all of which would have been grateful enough to my friend, but for the fact that she appeared to have anticipated the very things which it had been his purpose to speak to her. He hesitated about declaring this difficulty, and, for a moment, was persuaded that he should be content with the favor which he had found, without troubling himself as to the particular influences which had drawn it forth; but a moment's reflection convinced him of the error into which he should fall by having any subject of mystery unexplained between them, and, somewhat hesitatingly, he proceeded to tell her of the difficulty which troubled him. Spoken in the most delicate and cautious manner, she was yet shocked and terrified. She recoiled from him.

"What mean you, Monsieur Brandon?"

"Do not doubt, dear Marie, that what you say is grateful to me in the last degree. It gives me what

I have long wished to sue for—a hope; it encourages me to speak my dreams—my desires—but—"

"But what, Monsieur Frederick?"

"But truly, this is the first moment when you have spoken with me on the subject!"

"Ha! What! You forget?"

"On my honor, no! I forget not a word you have ever spoken to me. Your words have always been too precious to me to lose. But, until now, we surely have exchanged not a syllable this night in regard to—"

"Ah, Monsieur Frederick! how can this be so, when, but a little while since, we were interrupted by that ever-troublesome Parisian, who would be a Count Poniatowski?"

"You have been deceived, Marie. I was not present at any such interruption."

"Impossible!"

"It is true! This is the first time to-night that I have been honored with your conversation."

"*Ciel!* and to whom have I spoken?"

It was a reflection to horrify a sensitive spirit, that a secret so precious to a woman's heart and dignity should have been committed to a stranger, in the full conviction that it was unfolded to the only person in whom she really felt an interest.

The insidiously mysterious manner in which the confession had been drawn from her, oppressed her with a strange yet undefinable sense of terror. Brandon himself, though profoundly indignant at the baseness of the manœuvre by which she had been imposed

upon, restrained the warmer expression of his own feelings, and sought by every means in his power to soothe the agitation under which she so visibly labored. But his efforts did not wholly succeed. Her subsequent responses showed that her mind still dwelt fearfully upon the incident; and when, at length, the interview terminated, her last lingering glance was overshadowed with a sad and mournful presentiment of coming evil.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET INTERVIEW—ALARM AND MYSTERY.

THIS was the substance of what I got from Brandon, of what had taken place between Marie de Berniere and himself. It is probable I should not so soon have been permitted to know the progress he had made, had it not been for the present difficulty, in which my assistance was required. I told him of the Egyptian whom I had accosted, and confounded with himself—of his not noticing my address, and eluding my pursuit.

"He, then, is the intruder," was Brandon's reply; "for I certainly have not been near you, not even in the room, since we parted, when I left you looking at your watch. You must join me, William, in the search after him. Let us separate for this purpose. You take one route, I the opposite. If you find him, stick by him till I find you."

We were just about to separate, each turning for the purpose, when, at the same moment, we caught a glimpse of the very mask that we prepared to seek. His habit seemed the *fac-simile* of that of Brandon. His person, in bulk and height, was precisely like. No wonder that Madame de Berniere had been deceived. There, too, might be seen a triangle hanging from his left arm, while his right hand grasped a scroll of unrolled papyrus; items not necessary to the costume, but about which I remember to have observed that Brandon was particularly solicitous. To note these things did not consume a second. Meanwhile, we made up to the intruder. Brandon instantly approached him. His anxiety, in regard to the lady of his love; the doubt lest she should be in any way compromised; the vexatious reflection that the other had listened to a precious confession, meant only for his own ear; nay, the painful conviction that the stranger, himself, in the character of Brandon, had drawn forth this confession —these considerations had all combined to warm my friend with resentments which none but he could have so well suppressed, and which were struggling energetically for utterance within his bosom. They made him equally prompt and decided. He tapped the stranger on his shoulder. The other turned quietly without a start, with the air, indeed, of a person by whom the salutation was expected. Brandon led him aside, I following closely.

"A word with you, sir."

"A dozen, if you please, sir," was the reply, in cold monotonous accents.

"You are accommodating. It may require as many. Suffer me then to ask, sir, who you are, and by what right are you here?"

"Really, venerable brother, you challenge my rights as if your own were exclusive. I might return your question with some propriety. But go to Madame de Berniere—she can better reply to your question."

"The evasion will not serve you, sir. It is by her that I am commissioned to make the demand."

"Ah! it is by her, then! Well, sir—go to her, and say that if *she* desires it, I will unmask for her satisfaction, in her presence. But, mark me, in her presence only."

"Enough!—William, do you remain with the stranger. See that he does not escape you."

This was said in a whisper; and without the pause of a second, Frederick disappeared. Our simulacrum, meanwhile, was in no way disquieted. Our proceedings had not been so quietly conducted but that they had reached other ears, and curious eyes were beginning to peer about us. Meanwhile, Brandon had sought his mistress. She received him with an eagerness proportioned to her anxiety. He communicated what had taken place between himself and the stranger.

"Insolent!" was the exclamation of the haughty beauty, now thoroughly aroused.

"Say but the word, dear Marie," was the whisper of Frederick Brandon, "and I will fling him from the window."

He was the person to have done it without a word. But the fair hostess declined his proffered service.

"No! no! Frederick," she answered, with a delighted smile; "no; that would only spoil the assembly. Besides, it may be some friend or acquaintance —some one recently arrived in the city—who knows me well, and who should have been invited. There may be some mistake. I grant him the interview. Conduct him to the opposite apartment, to which I will lead the way. You will wait upon us, Frederick, at the door."

The instructions were not given unheard. By the time that Brandon got back to the spot where he had left me with the stranger, there was quite a smart little excitement in the assembly. We were the centre of a ring—the observed of all observers; though, by the way, the excitement was mostly due to the opinion, generally entertained, that this affair was only the beginning of some new surprise—something dramatic—which had been devised by our ingenious hostess, for the amusement of her guests. I was not a little disquieted, you may be sure, by the novelty of my position; not so with my Egyptian. He remained in a state of the most perfect composure, neither seeming to see, nor to feel, the increasing curiosity and numbers of the circle around us. Those of us, myself among the number, who did not believe him to be a part of the entertainment, began now to consider him some old friend of the family, who had just arrived from the river, and had found his way to the mansion, designing a pleasant surprise to its

mistress. The coincidence of costume was a trifling difficulty only, which a single moment of conjecture easily overcame. At length Brandon made his appearance, and relieved me of my trust. He communicated to the stranger the consent of Madame de Berniere to receive him in private, and with no more words, they proceeded together in the direction of the chamber assigned for interview. I followed close behind the two, and was followed, in turn, by some dozen others, curious to pry into the mystery, and to retail it to the multitude. When we reached the door where Madame de Berniere awaited the stranger, both himself and Brandon entered the room. The door was instantly closed behind them, and locked; the key being taken into my hands. In a moment after, however, a tapping from within caused me to open it, and Brandon came out; the stranger having positively refused to unmask as long as he was present. My friend was anxious and uneasy—that I could perceive only, as he did not once look upon me; but he suffered his emotions to be seen in no other way. We could hear the soft, dignified tones of Madame de Berniere within, for a few sentences apparently; but the words were undistinguishable. These were followed by a subdued manner. A pause ensued, and the murmuring sounds were renewed. A single word apparently, spoken by Madame de Berniere rather loudly, then engaged our attention; and Brandon turned quickly to the door; but paused, in consequence of the silence that followed. This was broken once more by a brief murmur, which the

voice of our hostess was heard to interrupt by the single exclamation—"Oh!" which we distinctly caught without. The murmuring continued for several seconds and suddenly subsided; the pause might have been for half a minute—a deep silence—broken by such a shriek from Madame de Berniere—a shriek of horror, of agony, and of the wildest terror, such as I hope never to hear again. This was succeeded by a grating sound, the noise of a falling body, with the rattle and crash of a chair which seemed to have been crushed in the same instant. The whole thing was over in a moment, and, in the next, not waiting for me to open the door, Frederick Brandon drove it from its fastenings with a single application of his foot. We rushed in, followed by a crowd, and there lay the beautiful Marie de Berniere, prostrate, senseless, with her face prone upon the floor. But the Egyptian was nowhere to be seen! How had he escaped? The windows were all closed; he had not passed by us, that was certain. There was but one other door to the chamber; and that led into the ball-room, and was locked, with the key withdrawn. There was some strange and terrible mystery! We turned for its solution to the lovely hostess. She was already raised and supported, in the arms of Brandon. Not a word escaped him, and but for the pallor upon his cheeks, and the great blue corded vein upon his forehead—swollen to a deformity—and but for the close compression of his lips, none would have thought that he suffered any but the most ordinary emotion; his calls for help were so calmly spoken—his orders so deliberately given

—his nerves so firm—his strength so entirely unshaken! He raised and bore the fair victim to a sofa. Her lips were livid—bloodless quite—her eyes open wide, and glaring upon us, but set and glassy, with a terrible vacancy of gaze, that declared, much more emphatically than any speech, the degree of terror and affright to which she had been so unaccountably subjected.

Some hours elapsed before she recovered her consciousness, during which period it was for some time doubtful if life remained or not, within her heart. Meanwhile, the company had departed—all but one or two near kinswomen, and Madame de Chateauneuve and Frederick Brandon, who refused to leave her until she had recovered consciousness. This she did, about daylight; but more than a day elapsed before she had recovered her reason.

What remains of our story must be resumed for other and perhaps longer chapters.

CHAPTER VIII.

We resume our narrative. Our readers, we trust, will not have forgotten the condition in which we left the lovely Marie de Berniere. Her reason had quite returned to her in the space of the twenty-four hours immediately following the mysterious fright from which she had so singularly suffered; but her strength

was recovered much more slowly. For a long time she remained an invalid. Her system had received a shock against which her elasticity of mood offered but feeble resistance. Meanwhile, her friends gathered about her with fond solicitude. Among these, as a matter of course, and most conspicuous, were Brandon and his sister. These were constant in their attentions, and deeply interested in the progress of her recovery. Her physician, one of the most skilful in that day and city, could afford her but little assistance. It was the mind which had received the blow. The sufferings of the body arose only from the ailments of the soul. She herself felt this, and it was to her priest, rather than her physician, that she looked for succor chiefly. Father Paulo Roquetti was frequently beside her couch. He was an Italian; a grave elderly man, of mild, benevolent manners, and broad great forehead, which had been smoothed quite as much by thought and study as by the tonsure. He was a learned man, a Jesuit, possessing a profound knowledge of human nature, and with just the capacity to try and fathom the most secret sources of mental excitation and anxiety. Under his guidance, from her childhood the spiritual guide in her mother's family, the ardent nature of Marie de Berniere had become greatly schooled and counselled. Her imagination, eager and lively always, inclining however to religion, had been tinctured somewhat with superstition, and the will of the woman, which was in all other respects strong and impulsive, was, where matters of faith and the church were concerned, as easily persuaded and

pliant as could be wished by the most exacting of spiritual fathers.

Paul Roquetti did not show himself very imperative as a guide and teacher; but he was not the less powerful because he did not seem greatly inclined to use his authority. He was a profound master, who knew how much safer it was to shape and to conduct, than to endeavor to compel the mind; and he had long since discovered that the temper, which only showed itself stubborn under the opposition of another will, might be rendered sufficiently ductile if persuaded that it simply obeyed its own. His power over his flock was prodigious, if for no other reason than because he appeared to be so wholly unconscious that he possessed any; and this secret, in connection with his unquestionable resources of thought and knowledge, left his authority almost without limit among the more religious of his followers. Marie de Berniere was one of those who most readily acknowledged his influence. He had been to her a mild and indulgent father, exhibiting a gentle sympathy which had won her affections, and a patient judgment which had schooled her conduct from the first hours of her girlhood. If she had anything for which to reproach him, it was that he had counselled obedience to those commands of her mother, which had allied her to a man whom she did not love, and subjected her to a tyrant who could provoke no other feelings than disgust and fear.

Her present condition naturally drew him to her bedside, and he became very soon the counsellor to

whom she most deferred. We shall see the natural reason for this hereafter. Her other friends gradually withdrew, assured of her continued improvement, while regretting that it should be so slow. There were sufficient motives for Madame de Chateauneuve, the sister of Frederick Brandon, lingering after all the rest, in attendance upon her suffering friend. But even she discovered, after a little while, that the unhappy widow yielded only a reluctant ear to worldly concerns, preferring altogether those of a solemn and spiritual nature. She felt this apparent slight, but had no reproaches. Her duty to her brother required that she should not seem to perceive what she could not help but feel. Her visits, in turn, became less frequent, and it was only occasionally that she made her appearance in the chamber of the invalid; and this, too, quite as frequently in compliance with the requisition of Frederick, as because of her own desires or sense of duty.

Meanwhile, the little world of New Orleans was full of reports in regard to the cause of terror which had dismissed the guests at the *bal masque* of the fair widow, in such "admired disorder." Who was the Egyptian, whose personation of my friend's costume had enabled him to compass his *affaire de cœur* with Madame de Berniere—who had visited her with such a mortal fright, and had finally disappeared so unaccountably? The town had its solution of all the mystery, but, though it would not exactly anticipate our own, we must forbear to give it. Enough, that a most frightful story was in circulation, which furnished

equal material for scandal and superstition. I suppose I heard the story quite as soon as anybody else, and with much more disquiet than the crowd. I had already broached the subject of the *bal masque*, and the fright, to Frederick, but he either was unwilling or unable to give me any clue to the mystery. He had been permitted a private interview with Madame de Berniere, yet neither that nor those which his sister had enjoyed, had resulted in any discoveries. The unhappy object of this mystery shrunk from all explanation, and her health was quite too delicate to permit even the least scrupulous curiosity to press the inquiry upon her. But there had been long and undisturbed conferences between herself and Father Roquetti, and, in all probability, she had fully revealed herself to him. It is certain that, for some weeks after the affair, nothing was known, positively, to Frederick Brandon or his sister, calculated to satisfy their doubts or make them confident of their knowledge.

In all this time, Frederick Brandon was sufficiently miserable. I conversed with him frequently, anxious to feel, yet without seeking to probe, the condition of his mind. But his unwonted taciturnity spoke volumes, when I remembered his character and disposition. He had been latterly suffered to see Marie de Berniere on several occasions, but for a brief space only at every visit. At such periods there were always other persons present; the priest, his own sister, or some of her kinswomen. At these times her treatment of Frederick had been distinguished by a marked

regard; though she spoke but little with him, and then only on indifferent topics. Frequent sighs broke from her during these interviews, and her eye perused him always with fondness, and dwelt with a sad and significant earnestness on the deep, devoted glances which spoke from his. All this was enough to trouble my friend; but his mind, if disturbed and unhappy, was by no means disordered. It never once lost its balance.

He said to me, returning one day from a visit to the dwelling of Marie—

"I may as well confide to you, William, that I was engaged to her. She consented, the very day of the night of the *bal masque*, and in the very apartment in which she received her fright. Since that time, we have not once had an opportunity of speaking in private together, and, hitherto, she has evidently sought to avoid such an interview. At this juncture, I dare not remonstrate against this. I must submit; without complaint, or even expostulation. Her life is quite too precious, and her condition too perilous, to suffer me to annoy her by a reference to any exciting matter. But, from what I see, my instincts persuade me that she is preparing to free herself from our engagement. I do not mean by this that she is at all anxious to do so. On the contrary, it is no idle vanity that assures me of the extreme reluctance with which she will submit to what appears an inevitable necessity. She will defer it for some time longer—to the very last moment; and the very suspense—the anxiety—this constant brooding over the one purpose—will pro-

long her infirmity, and keep her suffering as well in body as in mind. But that she is preparing to come to this determination, I foresee; and I am strengthening myself, as well as I can, against the shock."

"But what has she said to lead you to this apprehension?"

"Not a syllable; but words are by no means necessary in such cases. I see it in her looks, and feel it as the consequence of her actions. My presence brings her equally pain and pleasure. Her eyes fill as I approach her, and she wrings my hand with the grasp of one who takes a farewell. There are a thousand indefinable things which enable one who feels quickly and keenly, to understand; and that which I tell you I believe, I almost feel that I know."

"And you will submit to lose her?"

"I have not said that! But you will perceive that her determination must be occasioned by the events of that fatal night. Now it is important that we get at a solution of that mystery. What my argument will be, must depend upon her revelation; for which I wait impatiently. It will come soon. If she loves me truly and deeply, as I believe, she will tell me all. This she will feel as due to me, and to herself, particularly, for her own justification, if her purpose be to discard me. But I have broached the subject to you for a special reason. You spoke, yesterday, of your purpose to return soon to Tennessee. This you must not think of at present—not, at least, until my affair is fully settled. I feel that I shall want you. I have suspicions of foul play in this business, and I

need the assistance of a friend in whose fidelity I can put every trust."

"Foul play, Frederick! Whom do you suspect?"

"Not Marie, of course. But all these stories about town, and which find supernatural solution of this mystery, are pure absurdities. But they are not the less credible among the greater number. It is understood, of course, that this Egyptian is at the bottom of the affair. To discover who he is, is the first important matter. I take for granted that he is an enemy of mine—most probably he is an admirer of Marie. Do you remember his manner when we first encountered him? His haughty carriage—scornful gesture—the cold insolence of his tone—the dry brevity of his answers—all full of defiance? These, at the moment, struck me as evidence of hostility."

"I remember! And you regard him as a rival?"

"Surely, what else? He has evidently a design upon her, and it is equally apparent that he possesses a strange power over her. What is this power, and who is he? I have been vainly racking my brain for an answer. I know the fate of all those who aspired to her hand. She dismissed Bonneville; she slighted and despised De Castries. Miravent was not more fortunate. I can recall no more. None of these are now in attendance upon her. Bonneville has gone north, De Castries is in France, and Miravent visits the house no longer."

"May not one of the two former have returned?"

"I should have heard of it. It is more probable

that there is some new candidate in the field. And yet, how any such could have wrought such results?"

"Could they have slandered you to her?"

"Very probably; yet I fear nothing from this quarter. If they had, it would have provoked her scorn—her indignation only—and not her terrors. Besides, she would have instantly told me all. No, no! There is something more than this. It is very strange, certainly; but I shall soon hear from her, and then I will fathom the mystery, if there be any, so help me, Heaven!"

Here our conference ended for the time. The very next day, my friend was summoned to an interview with Marie de Berniere. We must reserve the rest for another chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INTERVIEW.

Frederick Brandon eagerly obeyed the summons of his mistress. He was fortunate in finding the lovely invalid alone. The meeting was evidently designed for him. She was still feeble, and apparently quite as great a sufferer in mental respects as ever. She received him in her chamber in tears and silence. He grasped her hand and held it without speaking. Thus, for a while, they both remained, both seeming equally reluctant to begin the work of explanation, and waiting, as it were, for some happy inspiration to

shape the course of an interview which promised to be full of embarrassments. The reluctance of Frederick arose entirely from his sympathy for her situation. He dared not add to her distress by urging his own anxieties. She felt the delicacy of his consideration, and, at length, though with a very decided effort, she began the conference—

"Frederick!—"

"Dear Marie!"

She proceeded:—

"I have summoned you, dear Frederick, to an interview which could not always be deferred. However painful to myself, I owe it to you to come to an explanation with you. In giving you my heart, as I have done irrevocably, and in consenting to be your wife—I gave you a right to know all that concerns me, and all with which my heart is troubled. And yet, I shrink—oh, Frederick, how I shrink and tremble at the necessity which compels me—though my heart breaks under it—to tell you that we must rend apart and forever the links which bind us, and which every feeling of my soul would only persuade me, in spite of all necessities, to bind and rivet more surely and more tenderly than ever!"

"Marie—dear Marie—oh! wherefore this necessity?"

"Ah! you may well inquire. I shall speak fearlessly now. It is with no shame, dear Frederick, that I confess to loving you, as I never thought to love mortal man; as I never loved mortal man before. You will—you must—believe me; even though I make

this avowal at the very moment when I implore you to forget me; and when I propose that we should sever the sweet ties that we so fondly strove to unite forever."

Seeing that she paused, Frederick replied:—

"I can only wonder, but not answer you, dear Marie. To believe in your love for me, is absolutely necessary to the feeling which I entertain for you. It is too precious a faith for me to surrender easily. I will not make vain professions, Marie; but, in truth, you must be well assured that no affection in my bosom rivals in any sort the devotion which it brings to you. It is for you to say, why, with both hearts thus united and devoted, there should be a necessity for tearing them asunder. What is this necessity—what this terrible mystery which is to prevail against our hopes and happiness?"

"Terrible, indeed! most terrible! Were it not so, dear Frederick, would I have the courage, the heart, the strength for this!"

"Marie—I cannot doubt that you have been the victim to a great terror! I have witnessed your fright—your agonies—and the overwhelming affliction which left you insensible for hours in these arms!"

"Was it in your arms that I lay then, Frederick?" she asked tenderly.

He answered by pressing her hand within his, and the tears then gushed from her eyes as from a fountain suddenly relieved. For a few moments he was silent, subdued by a sympathy which he found it difficult to keep from the exhibition of a feminine weakness like

her own. But the strength of the man prevailed. He resumed—

"I knew your courage, Marie—your energy, resolve, and spirit; and yet I saw how suddenly and how completely they were prostrated and overthrown. I can conceive how great must have been your terror; but I see not why it should operate against that union which might secure you against any such annoyance or suffering hereafter."

"Ah! if it could! If it could!" was her reply.

"And why should it not? Do you suppose, dear Marie, that, once mine—my wife—any ruffian would dare, or daring would escape?"

"Hush! hush!" she exclaimed, looking round her with shows of expectation and terror in her countenance: "Forbear, Frederick, you know not what you say, or whom you threaten. Oh! I know your strength and courage. I well know that, under your guardianship, no *mortal* would ever venture to wrong or to offend me. But it is no *mortal* danger that I dread! Frederick, do you not believe that the spirits of the dead may reappear on earth—may seek those whom they have known—may speak words of rebuke and warning and terror to the living—may threaten and denounce—may decree, as in my case, that hearts shall be torn asunder, and hopes be trampled into nothing—hopes, the fondest and sweetest that ever dawned upon the soul of woman!—Frederick, do you believe all this?"

He remained silent as she paused, closely observing her features, which were almost convulsed; her lips

white and trembling—her eyes glaring rather than gazing into his own—yet, with such a strange union of fondness with terror—such devotion with such despair—that his own heart beat with increasing passion (rather than with such fears as her words might have inspired) to behold the affection which was so evident in hers. His silence disquieted her.

"Speak!" she cried; "speak to me, dear Frederick, and tell me if you believe these things."

"Marie—to answer you, I must be calm! I see that this mystery is somewhat deeper than I had reason to believe it. Let me entreat you to be soothed—do not hurry yourself; yet tell me all your secret, before you demand my answer!"

"Oh! I must speak hurriedly if I would speak at all! Frederick, dear Frederick—that Egyptian—"

"Ha!"

"Was Colonel de Berniere—"

She fell back gasping. Frederick supported her head, and his lips were pressed tenderly upon her brow. She pushed him from her.

"I forget! I forget! Oh, Frederick, this was forbidden. My love for you was forbidden. I am commanded to fling every mortal affection from my heart—to deny you—to deny myself—to forego all hopes of human happiness—every dream that ever spoke to me of joy on earth!"

"And who could deny you this? What is the power to decree in this sort—to pass such a doom, to utter such a judgment?"

"He it was—the Egyptian! He said it! He!

The spectre of my deceased husband. He knew all! He told me all! Our vows, our engagements, our meetings, when neither of us dreamed that eye beheld us—in the dim shadows of the evening, and we had no doubt of our security, and no feeling but that of bliss!"

"And yet, Marie, all this knowledge might be possessed by mortals like ourselves! Excellent friends may have been upon the watch—jealous rivals—slanderous and suspicious neighbors! A shrewd guesser, with some slight knowledge, might plausibly conjecture more; and you remember, dear Marie, that, believing this Egyptian to be myself, you spoke freely to him of this very matter."

"Oh, were these all! But he knew more—he told me more. Told me, Frederick, of things of which you knew nothing. Laid bare to me secrets of my own soul—miserable secrets, such as I fondly imagined were safely locked up in the closest places of my own bosom."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, alas! and this brings me to another painful necessity. These secrets, Frederick, shall be yours also. You shall see how much I love you—how entirely—even at the moment when I feel called upon to expose such secrets as may perhaps change your affection into loathing!"

"Never, Marie!"

"Ah! we shall see! I will show you things which I had thought never to breathe even to yourself; and which, probably, but for this event, I had carried with

me to the grave unspoken. But I owe you all that is in my heart, though it humbles me to the earth to be compelled to lay bare the story of its wretched crimes and weaknesses!"

"Crimes, Marie!"

"Alas! Crimes! For the meditated crime is for us a crime already committed, Frederick. It is enough that the heart should entertain the guilt; it needs not that the hand should execute it also. I have been guilty, in purpose, of a dreadful crime; and though my hand forebore the meditated act, it is, nevertheless—I feel it so—a crime to be repented of in ashes and in sackcloth; a crime to make me quite unworthy an affection such as yours!"

"Alas, my Marie! If these high standards of self-judgment must prevail, who is worthy? I have my crimes also, Marie."

"But not like mine, Frederick. Hear me, for I shall relate the whole, and tell it truly. I will withhold nothing."

"Nay, Marie, speak not, I entreat you. I would rather not know. If we are to be torn asunder—which I will not yet suffer myself to believe—I would prefer holding you enshrined in my memory—as you already are in my affections—as the pure and perfect being that I thought you first."

"But this is now impossible, Frederick! Have I not already declared myself guilty? Your thought will brood over this confession, and you will suspect me of crimes of another sort than the real. It is needful that I should tell you all. You must listen

for my sake. It is needful that I should show cause for my faith in this terrible visitation; and for the submission with which I receive its commands."

Long and sad was the interval of silence which succeeded before she spoke again. She sunk back upon the couch and covered her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out from contemplation the necessity before her, and to recover the needed strength for the task which she had declared her resolution to perform. Frederick, meanwhile, with his elbow resting upon the pillow, had shaded his eyes also. He was in deep and anxious contemplation—suffering greatly from misgiving of various kinds, and brooding upon what he had already heard. He had already, in some degree, prepared his mind; and his future purposes had also, though vaguely and entirely a shadow, been presented to his vision. At length the silence was broken by his companion. Marie de Berniere raised her head and gently laid her hand on the wrist of her lover. He still remained silent, his eyes tenderly fixed upon her, with a sort of paternal sadness—that seemed to deplore the self-delusion of the beloved object—fatal to itself—yet against which he had no argument of strength for safety. His eyes declared fully his belief that she labored under a delusion; yet showed the sorrows of one who, at the same time that he felt this conviction, lacked the necessary means of making his conviction hers. She discerned the meaning in his glance.

"You think me a foolish creature, Frederick—deceived by my own fears and superstitions. I wish I

could persuade myself to think as you do. Believe me, I have nothing but pain and sorrow in the task before me; and nothing but hopelessness in the future which lies beyond. And next to my prayer for pardon, is that which implores that the penance be a short one. But hear my story—hear me, and decide. I shall unfold it all; and hope, at least, that when you have heard my sufferings, you will see some little apology for my guilt. If it should forfeit me the love you gave me, at least it will not rob me of your pity."

He took her hand tenderly within his own, and she began her narrative as follows:—

CHAPTER X.

THE REVELATION.

"You know my early history, Frederick, as much of it as need to be known in connection with my present narrative. You are aware that, when a mere child, I was condemned to marry a man twenty years older than myself, and for whom I had no feelings but indifference and fear. At first, this feeling was indifference only; and in the end it became dislike as well as fear. I was quite too young when I married, properly to understand the obligations of marriage, of its peculiar interests, its duties and desires. Had I known, the marriage vows never would have crossed these lips, in relation to the person who was then

decreed to be my husband. I was taken from school, almost from the baby-house and doll, to become a bride. My poor mother, of whom I would say no evil, was one of those persons, of whom the world always has its multitude, who regard wealth as the something all compensative, for which any sacrifice is justifiable. She knew not any affections that could be put in opposition to the show and splendor which it promised; and, believing that I had beauty and talents, her chief solicitude was to find for them a market. Of her purposes I knew nothing, until the moment when I learned that she had procured for me a purchaser. In this light I certainly did not regard him then. Col. de Berniere I had frequently beheld before, but I had never bestowed a single thought upon him. His person I knew by sight, but I had always regarded him with indifference. I thought no more of marrying than I thought of him, and had no definite conception of the condition until after I had become a wife. I had been accustomed to submit implicitly to the will of my mother, and I did so on this occasion, as on all others, with but little inquietude or doubt. She bade me prepare to receive Col. de B. as a husband, long before he had been at any pains to persuade me that he was a lover. Required to marry him, the indifference which I had felt for him before, he soon contrived to ripen into a stronger sentiment of aversion. This feeling, which I did not seek to subdue, it became the business of my mother's life to rebuke and to conceal. She silenced all my childish complaints; she schooled my love into sub-

mission ; she trampled down every resistance that my young heart ventured to offer to her will. I went to the altar with fear and tremblings which were ominous. But my fears were of a vague character, and I did not certainly dream of the dreadful tyranny under which I was about to fall. At that early dawn of my misfortunes, it was dislike and doubt which I felt, rather than dread or apprehension. Any conjectures of what the future was really to produce, were totally absent from my mind. But I was soon tutored by a stern experience. I cannot go through the details of this experience. I dare not. How I suffered, how vain were my appeals, how equally vain my performances—my submission, my resignation, the entreaties which I offered, the efforts which I made to disarm the brutality of my master, or to bear partially his yoke. Col. de Berniere was at once the most scornful and the most suspicious of living men. He quarrelled with all his own friends, and mine. He drove them from his house. With more than one of them did he fight, under no provocation but that suggested by his own brutal humors—by jealousy and intoxication; and, on each occasion of his quarrel with others, I was compelled to endure my portion of his caprice and violence. My hope was not allowed to grow. My spirit was broken in repeated conflicts, in which even the most complete submission did not disarm the tyranny. I seldom left the house, and never cared to leave it, as I was sure of the most cruel abuse when I returned. My mother soon became aware of my situation. She knew not half, but quite enough to make

her expostulate, with maternal interest and warmth. Alas! She soon found that though she had the power to bind, and had fatally exercised it, she no longer possessed the power to loose. Her expostulations increased the evil. He drove her from his dwelling with ignominy, and not only denied her entrance, but denied that I should seek or see her. For three months did I submit to this cruel denial, until she fell sick. Her illness proved fatal in the end; but when I heard how dangerously ill she was, I stole away to her bedside, just in time to receive her dying prayer and breath in my bosom. I fondly fancied that this event, which had taken from me the nearest relative I had on earth, would commend me somewhat to the pity of my master. I never dreamed that I should receive censure and abuse for a disobedience to his commands, at so extreme a juncture; and hastened home to entreat his attendance at my mother's house, and his care of her remains till buried. I met him in the great passage below, and in few words, but with many tears, I told him my painful news, and made my humble request. He had been drinking—I am now prepared to do him the justice to believe that he knew not well what I had related—understood nothing, perhaps, but the simple fact that I had visited the house which he had interdicted. He seized me by the hair of my head. He smote me to the earth. He left me where I had fallen, insensible, with the blood gushing from my mouth and nostrils, and hurried forth once more, not to seek the house of mourning, but to join certain comrades in a midnight revel."

Here Frederick Brandon, with a fierce ejaculation, started to his feet and paced the apartment. A pause ensued. He drew nigh, resumed his seat beside her, and took her hand silently within his own. He schooled himself with a firmness perfectly astonishing; for his heart was like a volcano, ready to flame and overflow. She continued:—

"How long I lay in this condition, stunned, stupefied, or in convulsions, I know not. For weeks I scarcely knew anything, but, in the mean time, a dead infant was born, prematurely sent into the world, and perishing under the brutality which nearly proved fatal to myself. Of all this I knew nothing. Nature had kindly accorded to my mind a degree of insensibility which perhaps saved my life. Had I been conscious, anger, indignation—rage that was impotent—would have destroyed me. As it was, when my senses returned to me, and I could remember all that had taken place, the awfullest of passions possessed my soul. A terrible feeling took possession of my bosom, and here, O Frederick, my crime begins. Before this period, I can really accuse myself of little that could be considered guilt—childish follies there were doubtlessly enough. I *was* a child, and frequently an erring one. I had been guilty of a weakness rather than a crime, when I took the solemn vows of marriage at the altar; and this weakness was one to be excused under the circumstances; for how, with such a will as my mother possessed, could I think of exercising a will of my own? But I had been dutiful and submissive to my husband. I gave up all my friends, all

society, at his requisition; and it was only when my parent lay on her dying couch that I ever disobeyed his commands. To the period when he smote me to the ground, I feel that I have few causes of self-reproach—regarding my duties as a wife and daughter. But from that dreadful moment, Frederick!—Then! Then!"—

She paused, and Brandon was conscious that her hand, which had previously lain upon his own, now grasped his fingers convulsively. He looked into her face. The eyes were shut and the lips quivering. He began to be alarmed. "Marie!" he exclaimed, in accents of apprehension.

"Nay, Frederick, fear nothing. I am only trying to muster all my strength. Turn your eyes away, dear Frederick. Humble me not by your looks, while I am unfolding the dreadful purposes which have once possessed my soul. Oh! how rapidly in that day did I then think and resolve! With what a faculty did memory bring before mine eyes the long history of my sufferings and sorrows; all that I had lost—all that I had sacrificed—all that I had endured. Never did such an array of bitter, dreadful, and humiliating experiences rise before one poor human imagination, without maddening the mind, and setting all the passions in a flame—all concentrating, as it were, in one. A dark desire for revenge—for escape from my thraldom—seized upon my soul! I felt called by my mother's voice, night and day, to take the life of my tyrant. The fancy became a fixed desire in my mind. More than once I thought to seize upon a knife and

stab him as he sat before me at the table. I secreted a knife for this purpose. I was haunted by the memory of that fierce and cruel woman in Scripture, who drove the nail into the head of the man who sought the hospitality of her dwelling. I secreted a nail, intending to emulate her crime. But it was in proof that conscience was busy to keep me from the deed, that I was continually seeking to change the mode of its execution. I abandoned all these modes. I remembered, finally, that there was a deadly poison in the house, which he himself had employed to rid the garden of the cats which infested it. I knew where this poison was kept. It was convenient; in that very closet. It was a dark whitish powder, the name of which I did not know. 'Poison for cats' was the inscription upon it, and I had heard him remark that a few grains only would prove fatal to any life. I procured this powder, and secreted it for days—so tenaciously did this deadly purpose harbor in my mind! At length, I absolutely mixed it in a bottle of the wine which I that day expected him to drink."

Here she suddenly caught both of Brandon's hands within her own, and bent round eagerly to look into his face. As she beheld its expression, she cried—

"Oh! thanks! Thanks, my Frederick. I see you do not loathe—you will not hate me?"

"Hate you? Ah Marie!"

"Yes, Frederick, I conceal nothing. In that closet did I mix the fatal potion."

He turned in the direction pointed out, fixed his

eyes curiously upon it, but said nothing. She continued—

"But God be praised, the voice of my heart at length spoke audibly to my mind. I repented me, in season, of the terrible thought. I thrust the deadly purpose from my soul. I flung the poisoned liquid from my hands almost as soon as I had mixed it. I hurried to yonder window, and emptied the bottle into the garden. Then, beside this couch, I threw myself upon my knees, and implored the blessed Virgin for succor to banish all such feelings from my breast. I found the requisite strength in prayer. Never again did I harbor a sinful purpose against him. Never did a hair of his head come to harm through me."

"Then what have you to fear, dear Marie; and with what, above all, can your husband now reproach you?"

"Alas! dear Frederick, who shall say when he is received to mercy—when he is acquitted of his guilt —and when his penance shall suffice for atonement?"

"Marie, this argument is not your own?"

"I confess it. It is the suggestion of Father Paulo."

Brandon smiled slightly, quietly remarking—

"It struck me as coming from a theologian."

She proceeded—

"But it was the assurance of Col. de Berniere, himself, that other sacrifices were required at my hands before my atonement could be complete! This is the decree which is brought, referring to the awful crime which I meditated against him. For this, it is

required that I should deny you now—deny myself—and rather shroud myself in a convent, devoted to God, than to think of any other human love!"

"Ha! Impossible! How know you, Marie, that this Egyptian was a spectre—that he was—?"

"Alas, Frederick! did he not show me those awful features, but too well remembered, at once of death and life?—features known too soon, and feared too long, to be easily forgotten? Besides, Frederick, did he not unveil to me my own terrible secret—the meditated crime, which was to precipitate him from life to judgment, and which my lips had never before confided to any mortal keeping?"

She paused, and sank back upon the couch exhausted. Brandon again rose from his seat and paced the apartment in silence.

"You are sure, Marie," after a pause, "that you never once breathed this secret to any ear?"

"Oh, sure! Oh, sure! It was too terrible! And now—"

Brandon approached and whispered to her. She answered quickly—

"Ah! that was sin upon sin! I reserved that from all the rest."

She would have continued, but he arrested her.

"No more on this point, Marie; I have a reason for it."

She remained silent, and he continued to pace the floor; his eye seeming to wander about the chamber in a manner which at length struck the attention of Marie de Berniere, and filled her with new anxieties.

But he motioned her to continue, and she suddenly resumed—

"How could I question this visitation? I felt the guilty consciousness of crime, and here came to me the spectre of the one against whose life I entertained it. He lays bare to me my criminal heart. He commands me to deny myself to man and to society, and to live only for penitence and God! How can I doubt this mission? He reveals to me the secrets which none but myself could know, of all the living, and thus confirms his right to decree and to denounce. I must submit to this decree. You see for yourself, dear Frederick, that we must part—"

"A moment! but a moment!" was the response. "Did this spectre—this Egyptian—unfold any particulars of your meditated purpose? Did he only state the fact, or did he exhibit such a knowledge of details?—"

"All! all! It was in this very chamber that I mixed the fatal potion—in that closet. There, said he, could that closet but speak, which beheld you prepare the poison—that mantle which saw you place the bottle upon it, in readiness for the dinner-hour—that casement from which you finally cast it forth—those plants below which received it, or that pillow which heard your ineffectual prayer for pardon! Oh, Frederick, he knew every movement of my soul!"

The eye of Brandon brightened, and he muttered to himself—

"Every movement of your *person*, rather. The

spectre only proves that he knows too much!" She did not distinguish what he said.

"Speak to me, Frederick! Oh! speak," was the exclamation of Marie de Berniere. "See you not that it is all hopeless?"

She knew not well what she said herself. But as he continued to walk the floor in silence, her agony of soul became too great for endurance, and raising herself from the couch, with a strength which was due wholly to her excited feelings, she darted forward and seized him by the arm, arresting his further movement almost by violence. He took her tenderly in his embrace, and carried her back to the couch. When she was again composed, he began—

"It is not to be expected, dear Marie, that I, who have loved you so long and so fervently, should give you up without a struggle. I have built too fondly, too profoundly, on your love for me, to be satisfied to forego, in a single moment, every hope, every dream of delight, which my fancy has been painting for my heart! A long future is before me—is probably before us both. We are both young, and I dare not doubt *that* affection in you, which I feel so earnest in myself. Are we both to live, and live desolate? Shall the long years, in prospect, be uncheered by any sunshine? Shall no love blossom and brighten for our future? Must the years move on wearily and slowly—cold, unlighted from those sources of happiness, of which blessed glimpses have been vouchsafed to us already—and which the benevolent Father of mankind seems never to have denied to any of his

creatures? Can I easily persuade myself, or suffer you to believe, that He has especially denied to us what He accords usually to all. I cannot bring myself to this. You must give me time to reconcile my thoughts to this necessity—to school my heart to this privation—to accommodate my nature to this cheerless future of isolation which is to make us both prematurely old."

"Ah, Frederick, but this isolation need not be yours! You are young and ardent. You will be reconciled to my loss. Other women will compensate you."

"Never! dear Marie," was the sad, but subdued reply. "I am no changeling. My heart yields slowly to the charms of others, and becomes fixed as soon as it becomes fond. Believe this assurance. I will not asseverate. It is not my wont. But, I say to you, on the honor of a heart that has long been satisfied to seek yours only, that if I lose you I can gain no other—will seek no other. I must bury myself in the solitude of our old forests, and, perhaps, become useful, or useless, where I no longer expect to become happy. Suffer me, then, for a while, the selfish struggle against your isolation. Give me time to examine our mutual situation, and only permit me to see you, at occasional periods, *alone*. You may deny me your hand—you may refuse to make me happy;—this may be the final decision; but, in the mean time, permit me, sometimes, should I desire it, to see you and speak with you. This privilege will not prejudice your determination; and, when you re-

flect, Marie, upon the sacrifice you call upon me to make, this, probably, is quite as little as you could grant."

"Alas! Frederick, is this wise in you to ask? Will it be wise in me to grant? Will not such meetings be adverse to our mutual peace?"

"And is the doom before us now so very favorable to our mutual peace, Marie?" was the somewhat reproachful answer.

She was silent.

"At all events," said he, "suffer me to see you tomorrow, and once or twice afterwards. In the mean while I will devote all my thoughts to the consideration of what you ask, and what I am required to surrender."

He pressed tenderly the hand which she gave him; and when he had disappeared, a passion of tears relieved, temporarily, the sorrows of the poor heart, that, suffering grievously before, was compelled, in secret, to admit that its worst miseries were never felt till now.

CHAPTER XI.

STRATAGEM AND COUNTERMINE.

THE particulars of this remarkable interview were given to me by Frederick that very night. I may as well mention that the story, in a great degree, confirmed the truth of the common rumor about town. It

is astonishing how such things leak out, or by what happy instincts the great multitude conceive the particular causes of trouble, in the affairs of their neighbors. There were, it is true, many conflicting conjectures, in regard to the circumstances of terror which had dissolved the assembly at the masquerade. But that which gained most currency, insisted that the Egyptian was the husband; and this led to a farther charitable suspicion that he had been unfairly dealt with—a suspicion which had no other foundation in the public mind than a very general knowledge of the brutal tyranny which he had exercised over his wife, and which was commonly thought to have been quite sufficient to justify almost any mode of redress, or escape, which long suffering and resentment might think proper to adopt. There were a few even less charitable, who fancied that the husband's failings were of the most harmless character, and hurt nobody but himself; that the wife was evidently a Tartar, and had, no doubt, got rid of her allegiance, rather than of her tyrant. A few of the would-be-philosophical scouted the idea of spectres in all periods, ancient and modern; but even these were found quite busy in giving circulation to the story. But these need not divert us from our narrative.

"And what think *you* of all this, Frederick—does it stagger *you?*" was my involuntary question as he finished giving me the preceding details. I confess, they had greatly staggered me.

"To speak plainly, William, I regard it as an ingenious, but monstrous jugglery."

"Indeed! did you tell *her* that?"

"Oh, no! I knew better. That would have been the very way to defeat my own object, perhaps, of finding out the clue to the mystery."

"But, if it be a piece of jugglery, Frederick, how do you account for the ghost's possession of Marie's secret?"

"That gives me as little trouble as any of the rest. Indeed, it is in that part of the story that I fancy the clues are to be found by which the imposture is to be detected. We shall see—as there is a living God, William, and as I am a living man, I shall penetrate the mystery."

"But how?"

"Oh! I see not yet the way, nor can I tell you, just now, what are the steps I propose to take. I must think, think *strenuously*, wrestle with thought as with an angel—wrestle alone, without food, and in the depths of night and solitude. I shall need your help, William, as I warned you; and shall, probably, have to call in other agents."

"Does Marie know your objects—your suspicions?"

"No! they occurred to me during the recital of her narrative; but I felt that every step must be taken with great caution; since, if there is jugglery, the best method for its detection is, to be careful to give it no alarm. A part of my suspicion is, that every movement of Marie de Berniere is watched, and that every word she utters, reaches other ears than those for which she designs them."

For a long time that night, until the short hours, we conferred together. Our conversation was of a character at once deeply interesting and solemn. It canvassed very equally the separate provinces of the human and spiritual world—their certain relations, hopes, and dependencies—their possible communion; and much of our conversation became practical in connection with the case immediately before us. But as much of this discussion was necessarily renewed between Frederick and Marie de Berniere, I forbear, in this place, to bring it forward, and will not anticipate any of the schemes or philosophies of my companion. We separated for the night, at length. He refused to sup with me; denied himself everything but cold water, and, taking the bath in his chamber, retired, as he had declared his purpose to do, within himself, and upon thought and prayer wholly. In the morning I found him wearing an appearance of greater cheerfulness, and speaking in tones of more than usual elasticity. I remarked on it.

"It is because I have work before me, and have already conceived the plan of operations, that I am so much livelier than usual. One *dies* more easily in action than he possibly can in repose. Effort of any kind, to a soul-seeking performance, is a sort of joy."

He gave me only a few minutes.

"I shall be busy all the morning," said he, "and, in the evening, I must see Marie."

I strolled about town, listless but anxious, and saw nothing of Frederick till next day. In the mean time he had again seen his betrothed, as he had promised.

He found her alone, as sad, probably, as before, but something calmer, and in better strength for the interview.

"Marie," said Frederick, "I have brought you a letter from my sister. Read it; it will, perhaps, speak to your heart quite as emphatically as myself."

"Ah! can you think so, Frederick?" was the reproachful answer, as she received the letter. She opened it with a deep sigh and began reading. Frederick sat beside her; as she read, his eyes alternately gazing upon her and upon the vacant walls of the apartment. The letter was, in reality, his own. He had his motive for making a statement aloud which was at variance with the fact. It ran thus:—

"Start not, dear Marie; nor, if possible, exhibit the least surprise or emotion as you discover the writing to be mine, or note the character of its contents. At all events, make no remark on what you read, and let your answer be in writing also, and addressed to Madame de Chateauneuve, though really intended for myself. There are reasons, believe me, for all these precautions. In brief, dear Marie, I have come to the conclusion, after deep study and long reflection, that you are the victim of a cunning and monstrous imposition, to combat which, successfully, requires the utmost vigilance, and a distrust even of the walls of your chamber. So well am I persuaded of this, that I feel it unwise to whisper to you here the several processes of reasoning by which I have reached these suspicions, or to urge my inquiries farther towards a discovery of the truths. My purpose, therefore, is to entreat that,

if you really love me, if you really desire my happiness, as well as your own, and, if you would really revolt at the idea of being deluded by a most audacious piece of jugglery, you will contrive to give me a meeting at my sister's to-morrow morning at 11 o'clock; when I will unfold to you the whole progress of my conjectures. In consenting to this arrangement, I must warn you to suffer no person to know your intentions, not even your servants. Do not order your carriage, but wait for that of Madame de Chateauneuve, who will call for you, a little before this hour. Let me implore you, dear Marie, to accede to this application. Your health will now admit—nay, require some such exercise; exertion, and the fresh pure air of these pleasant days will exhilarate and strengthen you. Supposing even that the decree which you have heard is really the voice of an almighty Providence, His benevolence will not be offended, nor His sense of authority outraged, if you resort to all reasonable and proper means to be assured of its divine origin. Scripture itself counsels us that the world shall be full of false prophets and false signs in these latter days—and there are spirits of evil as well as of good—perhaps a far greater number, who are still permitted, for purposes of mischief, to hover around the habitations of earth. You owe it to me, dear Marie, no less than to yourself —to my future and my heart as well as your own—not to yield to a decree which threatens the wreck of both, until it has been narrowly searched by every probe and principle which human reason has ever invented or conceived for the detection of error, and

the discovery of truth. As this revelation appears to be so entirely miraculous—so far beyond all the ordinary events of life—it requires that it should be scrutinized in proportion to its eccentricity, and in just degree with the vital interests which depend upon its execution. Yield to this entreaty, dear Marie, even though you should persist, finally, in the cruel resolution to hearken to no other from the lips of one whose every prayer will still eternally be yours.

"F. B."

The quick, intelligent mind of Marie de Berniere readily understood the necessity of caution, if she regarded the desires or the objects of her lover; and the first sentences of the letter schooled her sufficiently to the effort at self-possession, which it was, nevertheless, very difficult to make. Her emotions of surprise were apparent upon her cheeks, in their varying hues, and the restless and sudden vivacity of her eyes. But his will prevailed. She drew the writing-materials to her side, and penned a single sentence, addressed to Madame de Chateauneuve, which Frederick conveyed, without reading, to his pocket. She suffered him, at the same time, without seeming to note the action, to gather up and conceal the billet which he had brought. The scene was further enlivened by a dialogue, which we do not think it necessary to repeat, in which the lovers found but little difficulty in discoursing of their affections, and discussing their denial—as if it were now a thing unavoidable—without suffering their conversation to

exhibit any doubts of the supernatural origin of that decree which had been pronounced against their union. It was long before they separated; and Frederick fancied that he had gained something towards his object, when he left Marie in much better spirits than before, and with something like a hope glistening in her eyes, which her lips as mournfully persisted in denying to his ears.

That afternoon Frederick came to me.

"Your services, William, are about to begin. To-night you must look for me in a disguise. I have prepared another for you. I have also found you other lodgings. Inform your landlady that you will be absent for a week or ten days from the city, and burden yourself with none of your traps. Leave everything as it is. I will find for you a wardrobe, with everything necessary, where we go."

Sure enough, when the night had fairly set in, I was waited upon by a middle-aged gentleman of the old school, in costume and manner. This was Brandon. His disguise was admirable. I complimented him upon his skill in masquerading.

"So much," said he, "for the habits of us wandering youth in New Orleans. But we have had recent proof that there is one person who is a better masquer than myself."

He was followed by a porter bearing a trunk, which contained a sufficient wardrobe for us both, but adapted to our new change of habit. I at once proceeded to make my toilet, with my friend's assistance, and with old-fashioned coat and pantaloons, a massive

wig, broad-brimmed chapeau, and all the usual *et cetera*—to say nothing of a great gold-headed cane —I found myself, after the labor of half an hour, translated from a state of full-blooded dandyism and youth into a state of full-bottomed seniority, with the bulk and general appearance of a senator from one of the country parishes. Brandon was at great pains with me, and we set forth, the porter carrying the trunk. We proceeded to an obscure hotel in C—— street, where our employee was rewarded and dismissed. The trunk was put into the bar-room, while we went into supper, of which I was the only consumer. Brandon ate nothing. He disappeared while I was smoking a cigar in the bar-room, and was gone for half an hour. He brought with him, on his return, another porter, to whom the trunk was given in charge. Our score settled, we left the hotel, and in a little space of time we reached the very street and neighborhood in which stood the antique habitation of the De Bernieres. At the door of an old dwelling-house, on the opposite side of the way, we stopped and hammered. We were admitted by an elderly lady, who looked quite as much the German as the French woman. She evidently expected us. Our trunk was dispatched to a chamber, and the porter dismissed. A few words with the old lady, and her two venerable lodgers retired to their apartment. This looked over upon the street. Brandon soon drew me to the window, which was small, and furnished with heavy blinds.

"Look," said he, as he threw open the shutter; "there is the dwelling of Madame de Berniere ob-

liquely opposite, and at a reasonable distance. You are now established, my dear William, in the honorable capacity of a spy. Here, for a few days, if you really desire to serve me, you will maintain a patient watch, which must be unwearying. I shall sometimes relieve you. But it is highly important to see what persons enter that dwelling; and, not less so, perhaps, to see by what persons her servants are approached. This you can only do by day; for the night I have made other provision. A few days will probably suffice. In particular, keep an eye upon the old mulatto fellow, Andres. *I have made the discovery that he is hostile to me*, and is really reluctant that I should visit the house of his mistress; particularly since the affair of the masquerade. This is one strong argument against the ghost of the colonel, since it is scarcely to be thought that the supernatural world would find it necessary to make an alliance with the African. Enough! I will leave you now, but will return again by midnight. *Adios!*

CHAPTER XII.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE SUPERNATURAL.

I RESUME my narrative, passing over numerous small occurrences which may be noticed hereafter. Of the long and serious conversation which I had that night with Frederick Brandon, I shall say nothing; as much of the material was necessarily em-

ployed the next day in his conference with Marie de Berniere. To this conference let us now proceed. At the appointed hour, the carriage of Madame de Chateauneuve stopped suddenly at the door of the fair young mourner's habitation. The door was instantly opened to receive her, and she was soon welcomed to the embraces of her friend. Marie was already dressed to receive her; but habited so plainly, and in a style so unusual for the street, that none of her servants dreamed, when she was making her toilet, that she was preparing or designing to go abroad. In this proceeding, by a just instinct, she consulted the unexpressed objects of her lover. Her attendants were quite taken by surprise when she ordered her bonnet and cloak. Her maid, indeed, expostulated with her with that earnestness which duty and affection may be suffered to indulge in; first, in regard to her health, sudden exposure to capricious weather, and all that sort of thing; and, next, in relation to her style of dress, which the Tabitha asseverated, was by no means fit to be seen by fashionable eyes. But Marie silenced the officious damsel by a word, which was sufficiently positive without being harsh or stern. She herself, by the way, took the initiate in all the proceeding, and spoke to her visitor as if the proposed *drive* was altogether an extemporaneous suggestion of her own.

"I am so rejoiced that you are come," said she, "for somehow, I feel to-day, for the first time, like taking a little sunshine and fresh air. Everything looks so gloomy here. You shall give me a seat, dear

Ninine (a pet term of endearment to her friend), and talk to me as we ride, and cheer me, if you can, into better spirits. I am so glad that you are come."

And, hurrying her toilet, and wrapping herself closely up in the ample territory of a shawl of Thibet, she took her friend's arm and eagerly led the way to the carriage.

"If the Father should come?" was the apparent question of the old dark mulatto servant-man, Andres, as, with a hesitating and reluctant manner, he opened the door.

"Tell him that I have gone out to ride, Andres; that I want fresh air and sunshine. Say that I am gone with Madame de Chateauneuve."

Nothing more was said, and the carriage, with its precious burden, was soon out of sight of the porter, who yet lingered at the door. The *drive*, by Madame de Chateauneuve's instructions, was purposely a circuitous one. It led at first directly out of the city, but when a certain distance had been reached, the carriage was wheeled about, and, after wending its way through other parts of the city, was at length brought to a stand before Madame de Chateauneuve's dwelling. The friends alighted and entered the house, where Brandon was in waiting to receive them. He saw them approaching from the window, but did not dare to descend and assist them, as he was unwilling that any watchful or suspicious eye might detect his presence on this occasion. His plan of operations was one which must fail without the nicest precautions, and, as he observed to me the night before,

"Whether I am to play against man or devil, it is evident that my opponent is an old and adroit manager of the cards. We must beware that he does not get the deal." The impatience of Madame de Berniere, when they encountered, left him little time or occasion for preliminaries.

"You have provoked my doubts and curiosity, Frederick, to such a degree that I could not sleep last night. It is not that I believe it in your power to shake my faith in what I have seen and know. But the bare possibility that I may have been deceived, which your view of the case has suggested—my great respect for your judgment, which is confessedly so cool and so sagacious—my own present dissatisfaction and discontent—in short, the total loss of that peace of mind which should undoubtedly have followed my complete resignation to that fate which required that I should make every sacrifice of self; these all combine to make me eager to hear anything—even though it be against my hope—if it will only silence my anxieties. Tell me, then, Frederick, what is it that you know, or wherefore and whom do you suspect?"

"I have said, Marie, that I regarded you as the victim of a most cunning and shocking imposture. I am not the man easily to delude myself, and until I am assured, myself, I am not the man to attempt to delude others. I have listened patiently and thoughtfully to the curious and startling narrative of facts which you have given me. Startling they are—and they would be terrible indeed, were there not certain peculiarities in the history of this affair, which seem

to me to divest it of all its supernatural elements, and reduce it to nothing more stupendous than a well-conceived and cleverly played scheme of a practised and subtle juggler."

"But that face of death, Frederick—those fearful and glassy eyes, which stared into my own, freezing me to my very soul; that voice, so entirely the same; that ghastly aspect, and over all, the revelation of that terrible secret which I had fondly imagined was buried and obliterated in the insane thought in which it had existence."

"Stay, Marie; suffer me to proceed. In particular, let me request that you do not allow your imagination to become once more the ally of this superstition. It has done some mischief in this manner already. It was in some degree the knowledge of this susceptibility of yours that first persuaded the ghost-raiser to an experiment upon your fears, in which he has hitherto been only too successful."

"But do you, then, not believe at all in ghosts, Frederick?"

"I have no knowledge of the subject, Marie. I have never seen a ghost; but am rather more inclined to believe in them than otherwise, since I believe in the immortality of the soul—since I know not where or how the soul is employed after it shuffles off its earthly garment; and since I can easily believe that there are many cases, where, for specific purposes of mortal benefit, the Deity may permit the freed spirit to resume its habit and reappear in the ancient places which it has long abandoned."

"Well?"

"You would contend that this is one of those very cases, but I confidently say, 'No.' Indeed, it would be one of those cases which, by showing to me what monstrous crimes might be committed under such a sanction, would be almost conclusive, to my mind, *against* the whole doctrine of pneumatology. I am not unwilling to believe that the spectre may be permitted to reappear for warning and counsel—in order to succor the innocent whom no help could otherwise reach —or to baffle the meditated guilt to which there is no means of earthly opposition. But how can I persuade myself that the Deity will yield such privilege to the spirit who seeks only to mortify and affright; to the guilty spirit also: one who, in life, was himself a criminal—brutally regardless of the nature which he outraged! Should he be permitted, in both lives, to exercise a power of wrong? Shall he, after death, be suffered to renew his outrages to the mortal terror and prolonged suffering of his former victim?—to her public shame and exposure?"

"Alas, Frederick! but I too was guilty!"

"Not to him! You meditated a crime against him, it is true; but as you did not execute your offence, as he did not suffer from it, your real crime was against the Deity. To both did you endeavor to atone. You repented of your evil purpose almost as soon as you conceived it; certainly in season to prevent its execution. It was a guilty thought only, which better thoughts have sufficed to eradicate. He surely has no work of vengeance to execute!"

"But he may execute the vengeance of the good God, Frederick?"

"Scarcely! How can we suppose that the Deity will employ against the offender the agency of a far greater criminal? How suppose that he will leave to the spirit of malice to execute the decrees of justice? This would be to put into the hands of the aggressor the means of further aggression. Of course, we cannot pretend to sit in judgment upon the will and purposes of God. But it is not denied to us that we shall exercise our best modes of thinking—our human faculties of reason—according to the usual standards of mortal judgment. We *know* that the unfortunate person whose spectre you suppose yourself to have seen was a heinous criminal—a bold blasphemer—a brutal tyrant—a man who died literally with curses upon his lips! That he should be in a situation to receive miraculous power from the Divine Father of Good—that he should be chosen as the special agent for the prosecution of omniscient judgment—is scarcely compatible with possibility, according to any of those laws and principles which a merely human reason recognizes as characteristic of propriety or justice. If we are to regard this as a supernatural visitation, how much more reasonable to ascribe it to the malicious dispensations of a Power of Evil, rather than one of Good! This power, it is quite probable, from all that we see and learn, is as active and present now, in malignant hostility to the interests of earth, as it was five thousand years ago. It may work its miracles also; and the mission which it is thought to execute, in the

present instance, is of a kind rather to proceed from a cruel and envious than from a benevolent original. What does it seek? To vex and separate the hearts that love would unite; to disturb the repose and destroy the happiness of that being to whom it allowed neither peace nor happiness in life; to continue, beyond the grave, a persecution which it delighted to indulge while living; to mar the harmony and order of society; to fill our souls with vague terrors—with a constant sense of insecurity—with the dread of evils ever at the elbow—and to inspire horror in scenes the most sweet and peaceful! And all for what? Because of ancient offences—meditated and not performed, and amply repented, if not wholly atoned for. Are we to suppose that all our thoughts are thus watched by malignant spirits, in order that we may be tormented by their capricious hate and tyranny? Why was this revelation never made to you before? Why was this terrible rebuke to your hopes left unadministered so long? Why, if the purpose had been to adjudge you unworthy of all future happiness, such as the natural affections of youth bestow, why were you not counselled to the proper preparation for this sacrifice, that you might wean your thoughts from every but immortal attachments—taught sternly, at an earlier season, that, for the meditated crime of your heart, you were to make that heart expiate by a dark and gloomy isolation for its single unhappy fault? This warning was doubly necessary at an early period, to prevent you from involving other destinies with your own! You do not say that your spectral visitant

warned you against *me?* He did not say to you that I did not truly and tenderly love you—that I had not built largely and with confidence upon the hopes with which my love for you had inspired me? He did not say that I was unworthy of you, or that we were unfit for each other?"

"No! no! Frederick, no!"

"Why, then, am I to share your punishment? I was certainly in no way privy to your offence. If I truly and tenderly love you—if I am guiltless of this crime; if the prospect be a reasonable one, that we should be happy together in the bonds of marriage—what are we to think of that benevolence or justice in the Father of all blessings—whom we are taught to honor chiefly because of his fast attributes of benevolence and justice—if he shall forbear his judgment upon the guilty until he can sweep, with the same doom, the innocent also? Allowing that this messenger of evil comes from the grave, it is impossible that I can persuade myself that his mission is from God! Rather"——

"Forbear, Frederick, forbear! For my sake!"

"But in truth, dear Marie, he comes from neither! He is but a vulgar ghost of mortal manufacture. You perceive that he does not come at all until we are engaged to be married. This is a fact of considerable significance! For thirteen months has this ghost kept quietly in possession of your secret. For that space of time you too have been permitted to sleep quietly, with all its weight upon your conscience. There was no incumbent duty felt, in all this period, to awaken

your guilty heart—to check and rebuke your enjoyments—to school you with terrors of the future. You might engage in dances and song—to wander through the fascinating mazes of a gay society, on the brink always of eternal dangers, yet without a word of warning. It is only when you are in possession of another secret, that the awful monitor wakes up to chide you for the past and to warn you against the future. Clearly, then, it is the marriage that disturbs the ghost, and not your past offences. He leaves his cerements, and revisits the glimpses of our moon, when he finds that you are about to wed another. Was your crime, upon which he now so much insists, of no importance, and totally unmeriting regard? It would seem so. One would say, reasoning from common laws, that our excellent ghost has not so much desired to make you a penitent, as to keep you a widow."

The case was put with evident effect. A pause ensued, in which Frederick Brandon appeared to await her answer. She replied after a little interval.

"You are reasoning, Frederick, as men are apt to reason in ordinary concerns. But how shall we sit in judgment upon the means and processes, the agents and creatures, by which the Deity thinks fit to work. Lucifer, himself, we are told, is but a creature of his will, who works in obedience to his manifestation."

"I do not gainsay this. I say nothing against it; nor do I propose, dear Marie, to reason for the propriety of God's performances. But this is what men call a begging of the question. This is really the

question. *Is it* the Deity who works, or is it the man, or is it the devil? You assume the former, and I deny it; and we have but one process left to us, that of human reason (or it is our mockery only) to determine upon our several opinions. Neither of us may assume anything in the matter."

"But the peculiar revelation which is made by this messenger, Frederick?"

"To that I shall come directly. There are still some preliminary considerations. Assuming that Heaven has designed to influence your conduct by a special messenger—and here, dear Marie, we must be wonderfully cautious not to suffer the *amour propre* too readily to persuade us of an importance in one particular instance, which is to secure us this peculiar consideration of the Deity—assuming, I say, that this visitor is not only what he really pretends, but that he is a special messenger from God—and the question occurs, has he pursued a course which is consistent with the usual workings of heavenly interposition? The ministry of God, when he would work upon the stubborn heart of man, is as really gentle and unobtrusive, as silent and natural, as is the gentle falling of the dews by night upon the feverish and famished plant. Was the season chosen for this warning altogether consistent with a divine and benevolent intention? Would God delight, not only to counsel the sinner, but to scare and shame him to confession by a *coup de theatre?* Would he choose the scene of revelry for such an annunciation? Were there not a

thousand other and better opportunities in the long interval of thirteen months before—the still hours of the night—the solitude of one's chamber—one of those periods when the heart inclines to look back, and to sigh and weep over the memorials of the past!—when the mind is most free for contemplation and reflection, and the conscience most susceptible to all teachings which appeal to it through its consciousness of past errors and mistakes? Is it not reasonable to conjecture, from all that we know of the Deity, that he would choose for such a purpose some such period of self-security and solitude? But, on the other hand, how natural for the vulgar mortal, conceiving the idea of producing an impression by some cunning jugglery (such as I take this to be) to execute his design just at the period chosen—when there would be a great and vulgar sensation in consequence—a town talk—and when the superstitious terrors of the victim would be necessarily heightened by the most cruel mortification of her pride! How could we suppose that the Deity would work through such a medium, or with such motives? You remember the spectre in Job? How a thing was secretly brought to him, his ear only receiving it faintly and imperfectly at first. The hour chosen was that of midnight—when the deep sleep has fallen upon earth and all its living creatures. His instincts promptly teach him to shudder even at this little whisper. It is premonitory. It is sent to prepare and strengthen him against what follows. He feels the approach of the unknown presence, which he does not see, which had not yet spoken audibly.

Then he becomes conscious that a spirit stands before him, vague, formless, indefinite—shapeless and featureless—but looking a terrible power before his eyes. The voice then follows. The burden of the speech is spoken! How brief—how simple—how awful—how utterly wanting in details—yet ample, as addressing itself to a conscience already fully counselled by all its instincts. And thus it is everywhere in sacred history, that the Spirit of God reveals himself to the objects of his interest. He awes, but he does not scare them. He endows them with an adequate strength to endure his visitation, and does not overwhelm them with such terrors as threaten life. It is in this particular that we find the conclusive difference between the really supernatural visitation and the simulacrum. It is in this particular that the art of the juggler fails. That you should have been stricken into senselessness almost to death, by the spectre, is to me conclusive of the total absence of the supernatural. Look at all the cases that occur in sacred history. It is with a whisper that the Deity calls the boy Samuel, at midnight, to his mission. He accommodates his voice to the strength of the being whom he summons, and nowhere leaves him without the strength to endure his presence. It is thus that he enables his inspired men to seek him in the lonely mountains, the multitude being kept away—and they are never crushed by the encounter. There is but a single instance that I can recall, looking like an exception to this rule—which it really is not—and that is the sudden, silent hand, at the feast of Belshazzar, which wrote Heaven's judg-

ment upon the wall. Awe and fear possessed the hearts of the spectators, but not an utter death-like prostration of the faculties. But it was in secret only, in the ear of Daniel, that the mysterious signification of the writing was made known. It is one of the wondrous features which distinguish the operations of the Deity, that they are so quiet, so unobtrusive, so wholly unostentatious. Were it otherwise, his visitations would utterly wreck the reason of men; and a miracle, instead of being what it is, a special advent of truth, would be only a visitation of death. Ours is a day of human marvels, and science performs for the ignorant her full amount of miracles. In the spectre that we now discuss, I fancy that I can discern some of the workings of human science, and quite as much of a human art. Let us look to some other particulars. I am very sure that the features of which you speak, as distinguishing the spectre—the glazed eyes, which yet see—the wan cheeks—the whitened lips —the general aspect of the grave and death, which it wore, are all rather due to chemical agents than to the spiritual world. But, then, you recognized a striking resemblance to the features of the late Colonel de Berniere?"

"I certainly did."

"Now, then, if it were important to the mission of the spectre that you should see and recognize his features, and that they should so strikingly resemble those of the person of whom it claimed to be the spirit, why should they wear the appearance of death, also, as well as life? If the spirit were living, why

voluntarily assume the features of the grave, when it was the object to impress you with the recollection of the living man? Why, on the other hand, if the aspect of the grave were to be worn—of absolute death—why is it that the exhibition was not one of that complete corruption and decay which we know to be inevitable after a thirteen months' burial? The spectre tries to do too much. He does not rely upon his supernatural endowments so much as upon your memory and your conscience. He shows himself in a doubtful-double—at once the spirit of a dead and a living man, without wholly or correctly representing either! But there is a still more striking difficulty in this personification. Colonel de Berniere seems to have grown a number of inches since his burial. Nobody who knew him in New Orleans—and everybody did—but must remember that he was of under-size—I think he could not have been more than five feet four or five inches high; and yet you will remember that the ghost was able to impose himself upon you, in my Egyptian costume, and yet I am fully five feet eleven. I myself remarked, when I conducted him to you, that the appearance was not only very like, but that he was just of my height. We stood side by side, for a moment, at the entrance, and our shoulders were on the same level. I noticed one difference, that my simulacrum stooped a little, which *I do not;* this would prove him to be even taller than myself. Now, Colonel de Berniere not only did *not* stoop, but was remarkable for his erectness; throwing himself back rather, as is common with persons consciously small, who are neces-

sarily compelled to do so if they would seek the eyes of their neighbors. You, I suppose, dear Marie, were quite too much frightened to have discriminated these things, else how could you suppose the Egyptian, at one moment, to be me, and, in the very next, Colonel de Berniere?"

Marie seemed to admit the charge by her silence, her head drooping, but her eyes dilating—her soul at sea—at strife, in that deep interest which her lover had provoked in the singular and now dubious question which he had raised. He resumed—

"Now, Marie, it is one way to defeat a supernatural mission, which seeks only to impress warning and convey command, so to terrify the mind of the person receiving the visitation, as nearly to rob him of life and reason. We are bound to assume the condition in which you were left, as rather against than in favor of the supernatural pretension of your visitor. Such results never are known to follow a genuine spiritual visitation. But terror is easily inspired, even to death, by the blundering cruelty of mere vulgar agents among men. I have glanced already at the reason for this, but the point is one of too much importance to the argument to be passed over lightly; and I dwell on it the more particularly as one of the most famous metaphysicians of the age has adverted to the subject, arguing against the supernatural altogether. It is Coleridge who contends that no mortal could survive the presence of a real ghost; and he gives an anecdote of two youths, one of whom endeavored to frighten the other, who coolly mocked his pre-

tensions, and, being armed with a loaded pistol, warned him that he would fire if he persisted. But the former, having secretly drawn the bullet, persevered, and fearlessly stood the shot. The other, when he found his bullet of no avail against the spectre, swooned instantly, and finally died. The argument of the 'old man eloquent' is not urged with his usual ingenuity or profundity. He overlooks one element of the subject to which I have already adverted. The *mortal* might well frighten to death the mortal who relied wholly on carnal weapons, and offered merely a general sentiment of incredulity to a philosophy which has baffled the most thorough investigations. We, however, are to assume that the power which decrees the advent and the duty of the ghost, will so provide that his object shall not be rendered ineffectual. We must not doubt that he will prepare the mind of the spectator with a supernatural strength adequate to the encounter. His instincts, as in the case of Job, will become his premonitors. Coleridge's student had none of these premonitions, and his death was the consequence of an instantaneous transition from a blind and boyish incredulity to an equally boyish belief in the reality of the spectre! The solemn purposes of the Deity will not suffer to be baffled by the infirmities of the flesh, when it is so certainly in his power to succor and sustain the shrinking nature of humanity by a provision as mysterious as that by which it is assailed. That your Egyptian, in his first contact with you, myself, and others, should have inspired no such mysterious doubts and sensibilities as oppressed

Job—and such as seem, in all cases, to have attended the approach of the supernatural guest—is sufficiently against his pretensions. That he should have frightened you into convulsions is not more conclusive in his favor than is the attainment of the same result by the trick of the brutal juggler, when he seizes upon the unprepared and superstitious child, and overwhelms him with a terror against which, if from a divine intelligence, the spectator is always measurably armed and protected."

CHAPTER XIII.

RUSE DE GUERRE.

It must not be supposed that Frederick Brandon was allowed to pursue this long analysis without frequent interruptions from his fair companion; frequent questionings, doubts, and suggestions occurred during his progress, which we have not thought necessary to put on record. Nor must the reader fancy that the lover was, at any time, so abrupt in his expressions, as, in our anxiety to contract our narrative to certain dimensions, we may have suffered him sometimes to appear. His philosophies compassed, also, a much larger province of thought than it has been within our desire or ability to exhibit. Many things were said in order to soften suggestions which might have startled the superstitious nature; and much soothing was employed to pacify the timid in her superstitious fan-

cies. In all his conversation, Brandon was properly heedful of all her feelings and distresses. He had schooled his mind to progress, and, calm himself, mentally—whatever might be the emotions feverishly working in his heart, he had been able to address himself to the woman whom he loved, with a care that never once forgot the physician in the philosopher. He had succeeded, certainly, in awakening in the mind of his hearer some of that skepticism which had justified his own. This was indicated in her enlivened expression of countenance—in her anxiety that he should proceed—and in a certain resumption of her former elasticity of mood, which at one time had rendered her quite as volatile and gay as she was susceptible. He was at no loss to follow up the train of opinion and argument with which he had begun.

"All this," said Marie de Berniere, after a pause, speaking in low tones—scarce breathing, indeed, from excitement—"all this is certainly very strange, and very strongly urged. But your argument, Frederick, with some exceptions, relates only to general speculations upon the merely probable or possible in such an affair. In these respects you have made your views plausible; but how are you to overcome the one great fact touching the secret revelation?"

"Forgive me, Marie, if I claim to have dealt in something more than generalities. These I have employed as subsidiary only to positive arguments bearing upon decisive points in the case. For example, the appearance of the spectre, looking neither

like the living nor the dead, partaking of both in some degree—a spirit shrouded in corruption—"

"But we are not to know what are the characteristics of such an apparition—with what purpose designed—from what condition suffering—under what necessities made active."

"You have not examined my objections thoroughly, Marie. I object that the spectre was, at once, too much and too little specific; that he showed too many and too few details; that he so mixed the aspects of both conditions, of life and death, as properly to represent neither. But, I pass this particular over. There is one point which seems a staggering one: that Colonel de Berniere, who in life was six inches shorter than myself, should, as a spectre, be my superior in height; a matter scarcely consistent with the necessity which he seemed to acknowledge of appearing to you, as he did, at the first hour of his demise. Whether a spectre may dilate in one region and not another, grow in height and not in bulk, is a question, to determine which we have no absolute criteria. But, according to all vulgar human thinking, the case would be an exceedingly anomalous one; and I repeat, one is at a loss to account for any supernatural necessity to exhibit the features of the spiritual man, or living man, at all, in a case of supernatural visitation; since, in such cases, it is evident that the spectre has only to rely upon his mission, to find all your instincts friendly to his recognition. There was no necessity to appeal to you for the recollection of features which look like neither death nor life; nor stare

at you through eyes fixed and glassy; nor speak to you through lips blue and clammy with corruption. It would not so much offend our sense of propriety, that he should appear to you *entirely* as he did when alive, or *entirely* as he did when dead; or not to appear to you at all, except in a vague outline formed by cloud and vapor. As he appears to you, it does not seem that he resembles either condition, that of the dead, the living, or the spiritual; but as a something made up of all three. This seems to me to have been the error of a mountebank, rather than a ghost."

"Frederick, you confound me."

"I do not aim at this, Marie. My desire is only to enlighten you, and to free you from one of the most monstrous impositions that cunning ever attempted upon credulity. The juggler who pulls these wires, built quite as much upon your imaginative susceptibilities as upon his own adroitness."

"I confess myself greatly impressed by what you have said; but when I remember that dreadful revelation—that cruel secret—"

"This seems to me scarcely more difficult than any other portion of the mystery. I little doubt that you yourself have betrayed this secret a thousand times."

"How, when, where, to whom?"

"To the night, to the air, to the silence, to the birds! Persons of the sanguine temperament are continually talking aloud, particularly in their sleep. This is certain, where the mind is an imaginative one. *It never sleeps.* You have never deliberately designed telling

this secret. Nay, you have watched your lips with sleepless anxiety, lest they should prattle unadvisedly. Yet the very anxieties of that watch have probably forced you into speech the moment your observing faculties were at rest; and you have soliloquized the apprehensions aloud in respect to the grievous burden which lay pressing at your heart. Nature has revenged herself in sleep for the constraints which you put upon her when you were awake; and your unconscious lips were compelled to unclose their portals, nightly, for the escape of that prisoner whom you kept, during your wakeful hours, under such heavy bonds. A secret, in this condition, is the most restless of spiritual things. The deplorable necessity which such a captive imposed upon the barber of King Midas, you have not forgotten. The keeper of it, weary of his task, gladly seeks to transfer his captive to some other's keeping."

"But supposing this conjecture to be justly founded; supposing me to talk in my sleep—which I believe I do, for I dream a great deal—who is there to watch the appearance of the prisoner, and take possession of it when it leaves its captivity? Colonel de Berniere evidently never knew it while he lived. For months before his death we slept in separate apartments. In all that time, and even since his death, I have invariably slept alone, my maid occupying an adjacent chamber, in which she could only hear my bell. She could not, by any possibility, have heard the murmurs of my voice while I slept, or anything less than my loudest summons, when awake. That Colonel de Berniere

never knew or suspected my meditated offence when alive, I am very sure. He had never spared me the discovery, the shame, and probably the punishment due to my unhappy error. And, for my maid—can it be supposed that, if she had made the discovery, I should have been able to escape her assumptions in consequence, and in due degree with the importance of the secret?"

"My dear Marie, neither Colonel de Berniere nor your maid effected the discovery. I am very sure that the latter knows nothing of this, though she may be in possession of some other secrets not wholly disconnected with it; and as for the former, whether he knows now or not, I am quite as sure that he is altogether innocent of the offence of troubling you. But if you spoke not your secret in your sleep—if you suffered or summoned no confidant while you deliberately revealed it, it is yet most probable that your own lips have in some way made the revelation first. You say that you withheld it wholly from the confessional?"

"To my shame and sorrow I did!"

"You have spoken it in your prayers in your closet, when you fancied you had no other auditor than God himself, and when you invited him to listen?"

"Surely, Frederick, I have so prayed and so spoken in my prayers."

"How easy, then, to suppose that you were heard by other than spiritual ears."

"Ha! How?"

"Nay, I am prepared to believe that *you were seen when you compounded the poison with the wine!*"

"Impossible!"

"Not more impossible than the ghost! Nay, Marie, we are only to believe the ghost, when all human agencies are shown to be unequal to the mystery. The miracle is such only, when it is totally beyond the ability of mortal to achieve. Hearken to me, now, for this brings me to another of the arguments which persuade me that you are the victim of a fraud. In your statement to me, of all the particulars, you mentioned that when the poison was mixed, and in your hands for use—when the medicated wine was about to be placed in the way of Colonel de Berniere, your better thoughts came to your aid—your soul revolted at the crime; and with the firmness of a spirit totally emancipated from the snares of Satan, and shuddering to have been so far seduced to sin, you cast away the fatal liquor, and fell upon your knees in penitence and prayer to God. This was in your chamber—in your closet—and when you fancied yourself utterly alone?"

"The door was locked!—what reason have you to think that I was not alone?"

"The very best of reasons; which I gather from the revelations of the spectre himself. You may remember, while telling me of the event, that I asked you, cursorily—led to the inquiry by a sudden suspicion—whether the spectre showed an intimate acquaintance with *the details of your meditated crime*—whether, in other words, he distinctly named your

offence, and showed such a knowledge of the particular facts, as proved that he did not rely upon a vague suggestion, made at random, rather with the view to surprising a guilty conscience of which he had suspicion, than with the design to chide and denounce for offences fully known?"

"Yes—and I then told you that he betrayed the most surprising knowledge of all the particulars; described the poison; named it (and I myself did not know the name before); mentioned where I procured it; how I mixed it; what I did with it; when first mixed; where I threw it from the window; and of the prayer which I made by the bedside, prostrate upon the floor; the very words I spoke; the very tears I shed!"

"Precisely! Now, then, Marie, this very particularity assured me that your Egyptian was no ghost; certainly, none dispatched from heaven. When you first told me of these details, I could scarce desist from the exclamation aloud, that *he knew too much!* at all events he *said* too much. He proved to me, not that he was a prophet, but that he had been a *witness.* For why should the spectre do more than appeal to your conscience for the sufficient proof of his charge? Are we to suppose that the direct minister of Heaven, assured of what he says, would doubt, for a moment, his power to compel your faith in his mission by a simple general statement of the guilty act which you had meditated? What need had he to say more than—'Woman, what hast thou done! What didst thou design against thy husband's life in

the moment of his debauchery and security! How didst thou mingle the deadly potion with his drink, meaning to dispatch him to judgment with all his sins upon his head! And wouldst thou now wed another? Retire thou, rather, into the shades of the convent, and there deplore thy sins in sackcloth, that thy soul be not forfeit forever!'—What more would have been necessary to strike the guilty heart into confession? and it would have been enough for you! But our ghost was not content with this; secure in his facts, he was not satisfied unless he could overwhelm you with them. He thought you might be stubborn. He allowed *too little* for conscience. He aimed to do that which the true prophet does not think necessary to attempt—to *prove* to you the things which your own soul *knew* needed no proof whatsoever! The ghost, as I said before, proved too much. He proves to me, dear Marie, *that he was a living witness of all your proceedings*—all, at least, which were connected with your meditated offence!"

"Impossible! Oh, Frederick! impossible!"

The nice sensibilities of the woman shrunk at the idea of a *surveillance* so audacious and unmanly, as left her no security even in the sacred recesses of her chamber.

"Solemnly, dear Marie, I say and believe this to be the truth. I have labored intently to reason out this mysterious affair. I may not satisfy you, but I am myself satisfied. The progress of my inquiry has brought me, step by step, to these several conclusions: that the Egyptian is an impostor—that his purpose is

to separate us—nay, not only to prevent your marrying with me, but to prevent your marriage altogether, and with anybody—that he has fathomed your secret by merely human means—that he has employed merely human agencies; however obscure and difficult this may seem to you, in imposing upon you the appearance of Colonel de Berniere—and (a vital particular in the future prosecution of our inquiry) *that he had acquired, within your chamber, all the knowledge which he possesses.*"

"In the name of Heaven, Frederick, what is it that you suspect?"

"That your dwelling is pierced by secret passages, and that your chamber is accessible from without by avenues which you do not dream of."

"I will have it instantly pulled down."

"Nay, nay; softly: by no means. That would certainly enable us to prove the facility with which your chamber might be penetrated, but would leave the rest still doubtful, to trouble your thoughts with future misgivings. Besides, it would probably defeat all our efforts to discover the impostor."

"But who can this be, Frederick? I see that you have your suspicions of him, also."

"I confess it, Marie, but must plead with you to allow me, for the present, to keep this one conjecture to myself. It is not improbable, however, that I shall lead you to him hereafter, by irresistible conclusions. But let me proceed. It has been one of my frequent subjects of reverie, the construction of houses for defence and security, upon plans at once satisfying the

rigorous selfishness of the feudal Baron, of Gothic periods, and the no less selfish, but more voluptuous fancies of the Eastern Caliphs. I must premise, by telling you that constructiveness is, perhaps, my most prominent phrenological development. In exercising it in my dreams, I have indulged in the most mixed, various, and wonderful problems of architecture; and, at one time of my life, in the deep shades of our forest domain in Tennessee, I had planned the most audacious experiment in castle-building, with the very materials out of which we frame the common log-house. I had towers and bastions, and wings and keeps, donjon and drawbridge. The wall was, on one side, to be incorporated with the dwelling, and on another side the towers were to overhang the dear little Indian lakelet of Istahkapah, upon which my infant eyes first opened to the light. I had gardens of rare luxury, with verandas leading into them, and these so embowered with vines, fruit, and foliage, that the memories of Bagdad, and of the great Haroun, should be forced, irresistibly, upon the mind of all who entered them. A vast area was to be inclosed by the fortifications and flanking towers of the castle, in which I was to practise a thousand sorceries, for the delight and wonder of the twin spirit whom I should beguile into my forest empire. Of these dreaming structures, these wild schemes of a restless fancy, I trust, dear Marie, that I shall yet be permitted, in spite of our ghost, to unfold to you, as part proprietor, the wondrous history; at moments when your heart shall most easily incline you to forgive the builder for

his boyish follies. At this moment, however, I have only to say—as suiting a present purpose—that one of my favorite studies was the contrivance of secret passages through the walls of the castle; and stair-flights, entrances, and facilities for escape, such as should blind the sharpest conjecture, and baffle the most vigorous pursuit. You can have no idea of the degree of perfection which I attained in the prosecution of these fancies—how admirably I contrived my avenues in spaces inconceivably small, which I yet contrived to gain from wall and chimney without leaving any apparent region unaccounted for; how artfully I introduced passages into apartments, and sections of apartments, where it was beyond common conjecture that such could be; and with what happy ingenuity I contrived modes of opening the secret entrance into the apartment, making it easy and difficult at once—easy of use to him who knew, and when the emergency required it, and difficult of detection by the stranger, even where its presence was suspected. Thus my domains were penetrable or impenetrable, as I myself thought proper; and my privacy might be guarded by material agents, whose prompt efficiency was comparable to such as are usually ascribed to spells of magic. Thus could I escape unseen into the forest, and from the forest find my way back, equally unseen, to any quarter of my castle. Vaulted passages beneath the ground, connected with a secret stairway in one of my flanking towers, conducted me out to slopes and gentle swells of earth, which I was never to clear of umbrage, and my opening from the

vaulted passage into the ample sunshine was itself a discovery and an invention, which, were the subterranean a more desirable realm for the habitation of the great body of mankind, I hold to be of so much value, that I should certainly guard its profits by a patent."

Marie was beguiled into a smile. Her lover proceeded—

"These studies naturally made me observant of the susceptibilities, for similar purposes, of the ordinary dwellings of the citizen; and, whenever I was left to my musings, in a strange house, I caught myself meditating the dimensions of the walls, the spaces between them and the chimneys, the depths of fireplaces, the wainscoting, any apparent inequalities, or unnecessary enlargement of parts, any want of symmetry and proportion or adaptation—in short, a thousand minutiæ which might either provoke doubts or furnish suggestions of the subject. It will surprise you, as it did me, to learn that such schemes as I had only planned in thought, were comparatively common in practice, and that, in numerous instances, in almost every large city, human ingenuity has wrought out the secret passage, and opened the mysterious outlet, through the walls of the ordinary citizen. Many houses, thus perforated, I am satisfied exist in this very place. I suspect several, and have discovered my conjectures to be right in some instances already. But I never seem to have thought of the matter when in your dwelling—having my thoughts always more gratefully employed; always—until the moment when the subject flashed upon me, as a direct consequence

of that statement of details, which the Egyptian made, when he unfolded to you your painful secret. It appeared to me conclusive of a human witness rather than a supernatural visitant, and seemed to me just the sort of testimony which a person would be likely to afford, who had been actually present at the scene. How could he have been present? A single glance around the apartment led me to the conviction that it was admirably riddled with secret avenues. I knew it to be an old Spanish structure, and from its size and massiveness, I thought it not impossible that it had once been employed for government or religious purposes. Tradition may have told you something on this subject, but the matter is by no means important. The secret passages are unquestionably in the dwelling, very possibly connecting all the apartments; and now the question occurs—how are we to penetrate the mystery without being discovered by the enemy, or alarming him in his hiding-places? It is important not only to discover *how* your house is haunted, but by whom. Are you prepared, dear Marie, to facilitate my examination—which can only effectually be done by yielding yourself to a series of regulations, the value of which I have already discussed to my own satisfaction, though it is probable I shall not be able, in the case of some of them, to furnish reasons which will be satisfactory at present to yourself?"

Marie proposed to be docile, and her lover proceeded thus—

"You will again ride forth to-morrow with Madame

de Chateauneuve. We shall again meet here on further consultation. You will express no suspicions, and show none. I believe that your servants are spies upon you. I *know* that old Andres, your porter, is hostile to myself. If they are in the employ of another, your absence to-day will occasion them great uneasiness and curiosity, particularly as you disclosed nothing of your purpose previously. Continue your reserve. Say nothing of your ride to-morrow, but come—will you not?"

"Will I not, Frederick?"

"There is something further. Make up your mind to retire for a time into the country—to your plantation. It will be a sufficient plea, for doing this, that a change of air is essential to your recovery, and a change of scene necessary to your peace of mind. Let your preparations go on openly. It is possible that some one will come and counsel you against it. *Mark that person.* If you persist, it is possible some person will recommend to you a female companion. *Mark that person also.* But among these preparations, there is one that is to be made for me. Here is a small case that has the look of a dressing-case. It contains, however, nothing but a few folds of cloth thickly coated with an impressible wax. Contrive to send out your porter on some business that will keep him a couple of hours absent. When he is gone, suddenly dispatch your maid to my sister, who will detain her. You will instruct her to wait for an answer to your note, which may be written on any pretext you please. When they are withdrawn, take the impres-

sion of all the keys in your house, leading to every chamber, in the waxed cloths, and restore them to the case, which you see has a curious lock. It is one that cannot be tampered with. Here is the key. Keep it in your bosom unseen. The task of taking the impressions, I beg that you will execute between the hours of nine and eleven to-morrow morning. Your servants will return by twelve, and, at half-past twelve, my sister will come for you. You will take the box with you into the carriage."

"But why this, Frederick; and why are you so particular about the hours of nine and eleven?"

"The first question I will readily answer. When you are in the country I will take possession of your house, through keys that I will have manufactured from the impressions in wax. They will give ingress at any hour. You must pardon me if I decline, for the present, giving an answer to your second question. All shall be explained hereafter. Do you trust me, Marie?"

"Oh, willingly, Frederick. I have no doubts of you."

"Something further, then, Marie. Here is a letter, addressed to yourself, written with my hand and sealed with my initials. But the seal, as you perceive, is broken. You are to take it, place it in your bosom, allow yourself to be seen with it by your servants, and then lock it away in your desk. *You are by no means to read it.* It is written, and thus confided to you, as a snare to any one who may tamper with your cabinet. *It contains matter totally un-*

known to you, which is, however, so expressed, *as to seem to originate with yourself.* If your ghost pries into your secret places, he will probably possess himself of the contents of this letter. *If so, you will hear of him again.* The bait is one that he will fasten upon fiercely, if he be the impostor I suspect. In this case, he will revisit you within the next forty-eight hours—do not be alarmed—for he will then only approve himself to you as as impostor, for he will charge you with that of which you know nothing, showing, clearly, that he gathers his intelligence from any but spiritual sources. But if he be a sagacious ghost, he may make you *hear* rather than *see* him. He will avoid endangering his first impression, by a repetition of the experiment. Still, this is possible. At all events, I am confident that he will, within the space I have mentioned, revisit you in some guise. Even without this letter, he will have reason to seek you—your movement to-day will have alarmed him, particularly as you have gone forth with *my* sister. It will be naturally conjectured that you have seen and been with *me.* It will be apprehended that, with recovering health and spirits, you are losing the impression of terror, the wholesome effect of which was *to decree me to banishment, and you to widowhood.* A fear lest his victim should escape him, lest his design should be defeated, will make the enemy anxious and active. I repeat my convictions, that you will either see or hear of him. In that event, it is another argument against his supernatural pretension, *since it is so easy to predict his movements.* Yours, I feel

very sure, are regularly watched and reported. I, too, have my spies upon the alert, to ascertain if this be the case. If it be, it affords us another reason to doubt the ghost's honesty. But, we must spare no pains-taking, to render our proofs ample for conviction. You will see, from what has been said, how important it is to watch every movement, every word, every emotion, lest anything escape us to make the offender vary, and to awaken his suspicions that ours are aroused."

I have really only given the heads of this long and important conference—just enough to show how thorough were the investigations of Brandon—in what way he was preparing to work—how cool were his speculations—with what severity he probed the argument—and what determined earnestness distinguished his character. I have forborne all that was digressive in the interview between the parties—the varying emotions of Marie de Berniere, and the tender solicitude of her lover. The expressions and passages of affection that took place, are equally suppressed. The reader will conjecture them from a first appreciation of Brandon's manliness, and of the warmth and soul of Marie. It is enough now, if I add that the result of the conference was to awaken in the fair widow suspicions not dissimilar to those of Brandon, in regard to this mystery. His ingenious analysis seemed to prove already that she had been made the dupe of her fears. Her indignation was greatly awakened by the idea that a gross and brutal imposition had been practised upon her senses; and the

gratitude which she felt for him who had done thus much for her enlightenment, added greatly to the strength of those sympathies which she had felt for him before. She frankly promised to obey him in all respects, and with a last exhortation to be wary, to show no eagerness or agitation, and express no suspicions, he assisted her to the carriage, when she was accompanied by Madame de Chateauneuve to the dwelling within whose walls harbored the whole secret of her painful and absorbing mystery. To this, it is probable that a few more chapters will afford us all the clues.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARIE DE BERNIERE.

While Frederick Brandon was thus conferring with and counselling his mistress, I had been doing the small part which he had assigned me. Never did lover keep more vigilant watch over the dwelling of his lady-love, than I over the gloomy and antique mansion of Madame de Berniere. I have stated, I believe, that when the fair widow took her departure on her unexpected morning ride, Andres, the mulatto porter, stood for some seconds watching the carriage until it had turned the corner. He was joined in this watch by the Betty of my lady, her pert and officious chambermaid. These two conversed together for a few minutes with great apparent interest. The result

of their conference seemed to be some mutual arrangement, in the performance of which Andres thrust his porter's key into her hands, re-entered the house, appeared soon after with his hat and cane, and, after another brief conference, hurried away. Of course, I noted the direction which he took, at the same time not losing sight of the chambermaid. She loitered at the entrance for a little while, having a word to say to more than one person passing, and would probably still have loitered but for a sudden call from within. She looked round hastily, and my eyes at the same moment detected a man's arm, in black sleeves, thrust without the door. I saw only as far as the elbow. She obeyed the summons, for such it was, hastily re-entered, and closed the door behind her. Some other particulars, slight enough, occurred during my watch throughout the day; of none of which was I unmindful, though, of their importance, to the objects of my friend, I had serious misgivings. I expressed this doubt to him when he returned that afternoon, and for a time relieved me of my watch; but he was of a different opinion. The direction taken by Andres, when he left the chambermaid in possession of the house, seemed to confirm his conjectures; and when I told him of the man's arm from within, he rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

"Impunity has made the fellow incautious!" he exclaimed.

"What fellow?"

"Never ask me now. Wait, *mon ami*, till the game further unfolds itself. I will not trust a con-

jecture out of my keeping, lest it shall deceive others as well as myself. Enough that, thus far, my suspicions seem in a fair way to be confirmed. But give me something to eat; I am famishing."

He looked so. His face was very pale, and his eye was at once heavy and vacant. His mind had been under a severe tension for many hours, and his frame felt the affliction. I poured him out a goblet of wine, a huge one, which he swallowed at a single gulp. He ate voraciously of the food put before him; and when satisfied, he proceeded to put me in possession of the substance of the matter which I have already narrated.

"If she has firmness," he proceeded, "I have every hope of success. But I tremble for her strength to-night. She will probably be subjected to a terrible trial, and one, too, which will result from my own proceedings. That is, if my conjectures are well founded. If she stands it—if she does not fail, or forget, all must go right. I have done all I could to fortify her against the trial. The enemy will suffer checkmate, unless—"

He paused, and strode the chamber for awhile; then resumed—

"There is but one escape—one means of evasion from the effects of that letter. It is not possible, in a matter of this sort—so much of which depends upon the imagination—to guard every point of the game. There is but one—but one—and that is one which may lose me every advantage. But—"

This was so much soliloquy, I could not then com-

prehend the particular subject of his solicitude, and he vouchsafed no explanation. He may have seen that I was a little piqued, for he suddenly turned to me and caught my hand.

"William, my dear fellow, friendship must serve without questioning, at times. There are exigences which demand it. If you know me well, you will not doubt that you may see into my whole heart at any moment, when it really becomes desirable. Believing that I know you, I have no fear that your self-esteem will overthrow your sympathies. Be content with me, and wait for the proper hour of discovery. Now, I can show nothing. It is only in the performance of what is absolutely essential to the duty before me, that I can talk at all. The development of the problem, thus far, in the only secure way, has left me without strength for any more. I must have sleep for an hour or two. At all events do not suffer me to sleep for more."

He threw himself upon the bed, and to my surprise was asleep in less than five minutes—sound asleep—not even seeming to breathe. I hung over him with concern for a moment, half fancying that he slept his last. Before the end of two hours he awoke of himself.

"I was resolved not to sleep a moment longer than two hours, and the animal has succumbed duly to the will which governs it."

These were his first words on awaking. He sprang out of bed on the instant, as if with a new life; his tone perfectly restored.

"My nerves are right again," he added; "I feel

the capacity for work once more; but I have lived twenty years, William, in this last month. In all probability, in another month, you will find my hair absolutely gray. Oh, what a trial! But it is for her! I am content to perish, to save her from such a fate!"

He left me a little after. Night had fallen, and my watch was remitted.

"But," said he, "with the hour of nine to-morrow, pray resume your place at the window. I will relieve you as soon as possible. It is *to-morrow* which shall relieve me of all my fears, or crush my hopes forever.

CHAPTER XV.

I MUST continue as a *raconteur;* my own agency, at this point, being of little interest, and, perhaps, no importance to the action. At nine o'clock in the morning I had duly resumed my place of watch at the window. There was soon a movement at the dwelling which I watched. But a few moments after I had taken my station, the outer door was thrown open, and Andres, the porter, appeared, with hat on head, and cane in hand, ready to go forth. The maid-servant came to the door with him; there was a short confabulation between them, when he took his departure, she closing the door behind him. Ten minutes more elapsed, when she reappeared, shawled and bonneted, and sallied out also. The door was

then reclosed by some one within, whom I did not see. More than an hour then passed, before either of these parties returned. They showed themselves nearly at the same moment; Andres, the porter, first, and while he knocked, the maid-servant was seen approaching from below. He seemed somewhat surprised to behold her; and the two, having joined at the entrance, talked together with some earnestness. Suddenly they paused, and drew apart, and, in the next moment, the portals were opened by some person from within. At twelve o'clock, exactly, the carriage of Madame de Chateauneuve drove up; the knocker resounded; Andres reappeared, and the lady visitor descended and hurried into the dwelling. There she remained not long. When she came forth, she was accompanied by the fair widow. I stared, as intently as possible, in the hope to see her face, but unprofitably. It was covered by a thick veil. But I could see that she suffered from some deep and painful emotion. She fairly tottered as she walked, and I observed that Madame de Chateauneuve supported her to the carriage with a most careful solicitude. They were soon housed within it, the door closed, and the vehicle was whirled away, in a few moments, from my sight. As on the day before, Andres immediately took his departure also, the maid-servant, for the time, taking upon herself the charge of the establishment. He returned in the space of an hour, and, at three o'clock, precisely, the carriage returned also, the widow being again supported by Madame de Chateauneuve, who entered the dwelling with her, and

remained within for a couple of hours, the carriage driving off and returning for her at the end of that time. The two probably dined together. These were the events as I witnessed them throughout the day. Night closed at length, and my watch was ended.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when Frederick came, and I saw immediately that much had taken place, in the mean time, of a definite character. He brought with him a bundle and a box, which for the time he consigned to the security of his trunk. He showed me the contents that very night. He was more quiet and composed than usual, by which I knew that he was not dissatisfied with events; but he exhibited no exultation. It was with some impatience that I waited for his narrative, which he seemed in no hurry to unfold. He first supped with me, and when all was cleared away, and we had smoked a cigar each, I gathered from him the following particulars, which I report in the manner of a witness.

Madame de Berniere, having been driven to the house of Madame de Chateauneuve, at once retired to her chamber, where she remained for a while in a state of extreme distress, not weeping nor moaning, but seemingly in despair, and utterly disconsolate. At length she was persuaded to see Frederick, who waited for her in the parlor. She descended to him, and he received her with a degree of composure, which, considering her distress, appeared to her rather unfeeling. She seemed to reproach him with it.

"You seem not to know how much I suffer, Fred-

erick. You little know the tortures I endure to satisfy you. Alas! Frederick, I have learned enough to satisfy us both, even you, who are naturally so skeptical."

She spoke this with a fearful shudder.

"You wrong me, Marie! It is because things have gone precisely as I expected, that I am so composed. I see that my calculations are about to be verified."

"Indeed! I know not what you expected—what your anticipations were. You will be disappointed."

"I think not, Marie. I expected you to be again visited by your tormentor, and I see that I was right."

"Ah! Should that satisfy you? Is it that which leaves you so composed, while it tears me to pieces?"

"Nay, Marie, do you not perceive that if I am able to predict the reappearance of the ghost, he is somewhat under mortal influence?"

"One may guess successfully at times, and prove nothing by doing so. You could scarcely guess everything Frederick."

"That is to be seen, Marie! That will depend on what you tell me."

"And do you require that I shall go through the terrible narrative! Must I describe the horrors of the last night."

"If you believe that my love deserves anything at your hands, Marie—yes! If you desire to satisfy me, as you yourself appear satisfied, of the truth of a terror which I too must believe to be legitimate before I can give you up! You know my doubts. Be-

lieve me that they are now stronger than ever—certainly quite as strong. That you would be again visited by your tormentor, I was well assured. I warned you of it. Nay, I felt that his visit would be necessary, and that you should endure it, in order to afford us the opportunity to detect the imposture. Painful and terrifying as it would be to you, I confess for this reason, I desired it. Had the ghost not again troubled you, I might have been staggered in my doubts. As it is, I am confirmed. That I should so successfully *guess*, Marie, shows that I have successfully reasoned upon the matter."

"That he should reappear, I myself have expected, for the last month. I, too, looked for him last night."

"Yes! as you have looked for him every night since his first appearance. But it was only last night that I predicted his appearance. He did not come in obedience to your fears, Marie, but to my *will*. I required him to come, and he came."

"You! O, Frederick, this is mere vanity."

"Let us see, dear Marie—tell me."

"Frederick, Frederick—of what use to repeat? I tell you that this powerful being knows my very thoughts—not only what I have done, and would have done, but what I have only lately *thought* to do—what yesterday I thought to do."

"I too," answered Frederick, with a smile—"I too Marie, claim to know your thoughts quite as well as the spectre. Love looks into the very heart of the

beloved object, and needs not any look out of the eyes, any utterance of the lips."

"Do not mock me, Frederick."

"Mock you, Marie! Mock anything or anybody, Marie, when both of our hearts are at stake! Do not think it. Do not suppose that I do or ask anything in mere curiosity, with the love of experiment, or because of a childish humor. The affair is too serious for both—too terrible for you—of too life-long necessity and care to me. But, let me entreat you to unburden yourself. Tell me all as it happened. Omit nothing; for things, however seemingly small, in such a case as this, may be of the most real and absolute importance. In the first place, did you comply with all my instructions? You sent away the servants, I know; did you succeed in taking the impressions of the keys in the wax?"

"I did."

"Are they here—have you brought them?" he eagerly demanded. At a sign from Marie, the box containing them was handed him by his sister, while Marie, herself, delivered to him the little strange-looking key which opened it. Frederick, at once, examined the contents of the box, and seemed satisfied. He relocked it and secured the key.

"This is so far well, Marie; and now—"

"Oh! why relate? Why strive? All is useless, Frederick! The being who haunts me is too certainly from the other world. Take my word for it, Frederick, and spare me the revelation."

"Not a word of it, Marie; for I am sworn to save you from the arts of this accursed juggler!"

"Hold, Frederick."

"Forgive me, Marie! But when I *know* how completely you are the victim of his arts and your own imagination, I cannot easily restrain myself. Let me entreat you to narrate all that has happened. Let *me*, at least, judge of the affair also. You have promised me this already. Do not regard me as wantonly heedless of your feelings, if I conjure you to the fulfilment of this promise. He came!—as I told you he would come. Well! Did you again see him, or did you only hear him?"

"I heard—I saw nothing."

"If I remember rightly, I told you that such would be the case—that it would not be his policy again to *show* himself, and that he would probably appeal to *one* of your senses only. Had you slept before you heard him?"

"Not a wink! I could not sleep! I could only think of what you had told me, and to look for him and wait for him."

"My poor Marie! Your nervous excitability facilitates his arts. But as you were awake, and of course particularly conscious, you must have observed whether his coming was announced or preceded by any circumstances calculated to arrest your attention. Pray recall these if you can, and let me hear. It is important to the affair."

"Everything was still. It was after midnight. The room was in utter darkness, for, as you had coun-

selled me, I extinguished the light—though I never could sleep well with a light in the room—and my desire for sleep was such that I would have extinguished my candle even without your instructions."

"Well?"

"My attention was first caught by a low sighing sound, which seemed to rise just beside my bed."

"Was it momentary only, or continued?"

"Continued, for a few seconds."

"Did it rise and fall, or was it broken, or did it continue evenly as it begun?"

"As it begun, I think. I did not notice any variation. At the same moment, or soon after, I experienced again that cold breath, as if from the grave, which accompanied it before."

"Ah! that cold breath—yes!"

"Oh! it had a deathly faintness, chilling me to the heart, and as I felt it spread over me, I trembled at what I had to expect. That, alone, Frederick, proved the approach of something unearthly."

"Nothing worse than the opening of a door, Marie! But, go on."

"Ah! Frederick, this incredulity is dreadful. But it will be silenced when you hear."

"We shall see. You heard then a rustling sound?"

"I did—and then the voice."

"Exactly; but before you tell me anything more, let me know if you disposed, as I told you, of the opened letter which I gave you?"

"I did."

"Did you leave it where it might be seen, while you were at dinner with my sister?"

"In the toilet-box—of course, I forbore to look into it myself."

"And you have not done so since?"

"Surely not."

"It remained on your toilet all the afternoon and night?"

"Yes; during the whole time."

"And you kept as much out of the chamber as possible?"

"Avoided it almost wholly until I retired for the night."

"Good!—Have you brought the letter with you now?"

"I have it here;" touching her bosom.

"Very well. And now, dear Marie, let it remain there for awhile, and go on with your narration. The visitor spoke to you at last?"

"Believe me, Frederick, it was exactly the voice of Colonel de Berniere!"

"Of course! That was to be expected. That was what *you* expected. You are to assume that the imitation was as perfect as possible!"

"It was his very voice! And he adjured me against my doubts—O! very solemnly, very forcibly, very eloquently."

"But this was surely very unlike Colonel de Berniere in his lifetime. Do you not think that, if his voice undergoes no change, there should be also as little change as possible in his style and manner of speech?

But, let me not interrupt you. He exhorted you against your doubts, and was particularly earnest against your suffering the wholesome effect of his first visit to become impaired?"

"That, in truth, was what he said."

"You see, I can interpret for the ghost. Let me state further, that he again brought before your eyes, with fearful distinctness, the alleged crime which gives him power over you. He was terribly impressive in the picture which he drew of your meditated guilt; and awful were his assurances that it could only be atoned for by a life of self-denial?"

"He certainly said that, also, Frederick."

"See you not, then, that he leaves the grave only to repeat things which poor living mortals can say just as well?"

"Ah! if that were all, Frederick; but what if he read my secret thoughts?"

"That were something, Marie, if, indeed, you *have* any secret thoughts. But that is doubtful. There are few natures so wanting in secretiveness as yours. You are possessed of as few reserves as any living being. It is not in your nature to be secret, Marie; were you more secretive you would be more suspicious, and less easily deceived. You are frank and impulsive, and are very apt to exhibit on your face what is swelling and striving in your heart. But what were the especial secrets, known to no living person but yourself, which the visitor yet made known to you?"

"You are very skeptical, but you shall hear; and I

cannot hope that you will be able to explain away what I am now going to tell you. You must not take it amiss, Frederick, if, compelled as I am to show you everything that was said to me, I reveal to you those thoughts and purposes of my own, which I had otherwise never spoken of to you. You must know, then, that, among other things, the being said thus—I give it nearly in his own language :—

"You are even now meditating," said he, "to bestow a fortune on the man for whom you feel a passion. You propose to confer upon him a property of forty thousand dollars! What right have you to this property? None! You forfeited all right to it by your crime. You are, yourself, but a pensioner. Shall you presume, you who are a convict in the sight of God, if not in your own eyes, to deal in magnificent gifts. Even were the property yours, in your own right, and not that of the husband whom you have wronged, it would require all of it, ay, and much more, in prayers, penance, solitude, the utter abandonment of the world, the utter resignation of your whole being to a religious life, to atone for your terrible sin. Beware, Marie de Berniere, of what you do! Beware that you do not close against yourself all the doors of mercy. Let not your passion for this new lover become the means for prolonging your punishment—for making it of eternal duration."

"And had you meditated this bounty, Marie?" asked Frederick, in a subdued voice.

"Forgive me, Frederick, but I had, more than a month ago; and when I felt that there was an impas-

sable gulf between us, I came to the resolution to do so. Nay, the very amount which this being indicated, was the very amount which I had designed to convey to you."

"And you said nothing of this purpose to anybody —to my sister, to your solicitor, to your confessor?"

"To no one!"

"And did you think, Marie, to compensate me with this money for the loss of yourself? Did you believe that my affections could be bought off with a fortune? Did you suppose that I would accept this money, Marie?"

"Oh! why not?"

"Enough, that it could not be so; that your bounty would have been tendered in vain. I am not wealthy, Marie, but I am not a pensioner. Wronged by you, in the privation of yourself, I could have taken nothing at your hands. But, it needs not that I should dwell on this. And this revelation of your ghost, you conceive conclusive of his mysterious and supernatural mission?"

"What else can I suppose?"

"Ah! Marie, you have still to learn how powerfully subtle is the capacity of the cool philosopher to penetrate the secrets of the human heart."

"But how should he know, Frederick, that I had designed to convey to you this property?"

"How should he know? How should *I* know the same thing?"

"You?"

"Yes! Ask my sister. She will tell you that

three days ago I told her the same thing; and that was two days in advance of your ghostly revelation."

"Impossible!"

"True!—But I did not leave it to her testimony alone to establish the truth of what I said. Now take from your bosom the letter which I gave you, and about which I gave you such special directions. You will see that it has served its purpose. It will show you the mysterious source from which your ghost picked up your secret."

Madame de Berniere hastily snatched the letter from her bosom, and rapidly perused it, with signs of extreme astonishment as she did so. It had been artfully prepared, as if after a conference with herself, and was a seemingly ingenious disclaimer, on the part of Brandon, of the fortune which (it was alleged) she had proposed to bestow upon him, while declaring her purpose to retire from the world. The very amount thus asserted to have been proffered, forty thousand dollars, was stated in figures. "As if forty thousand dollars, Marie"—such was a part of the language—"could reconcile me for your loss. As if I, revelling in your wealth, could remember with satisfaction, that you are in solitude, and dooming me to an even worse solitude than your own. No! no! Marie, I cannot receive your money in lieu of yourself!"

There was much more in the same vein, but it needs not be given here.

"How could you know, Frederick, that I had any such design?"

"From my knowledge of you and your character —your heart, your generous impulses."

"But the very amount, too—how could you happen on that?"

"A good guess only, founded upon what you had voluntarily told me, long ago, of the extent of your possessions, and a knowledge of the persons, Colonel de Berniere's remote kindred, for whom you have hitherto provided, and for whom you would consider yourself still bound to provide. I thought it just as likely as not, that you would endeavor to force upon me at least half of your fortune."

"And so I would, and such was my very purpose. And you suppose that the contents of this letter became known to my visitor?"

"It was prepared for him! And if you still entertain any doubts that he has possessed himself of its contents—that from these, alone, he has derived his knowledge of your purposes, there is one circumstance that should remove all doubts from your mind."

"What is that?"

"You say that you meditated this purpose more than a month ago; yet, you see, that he has not conceived it essential to warn you against it in all this interval. He has waited until the evidence was actually embodied by the hands of another. In plain terms, he knew nothing of your secret purposes until I wrote them out in a good broad, bold English hand, and placed them in the treacherous guardianship of your cabinet, in your own hands and chamber."

"Father in heaven! to what am I exposed."

"To the arts of a most pernicious and cunning impostor, whom we shall detect and expose fully, if you will only be resolute, and do not suffer your impulse and your imagination to become the involuntary allies of his frauds."

"What further shall I do, Frederick?—save me, save me! Convince me of what you suspect, dear Frederick, if you love me, if you would in truth preserve me for yourself."

He caught her in a fervent embrace.

"I *will* save you, Marie! You are too precious to my heart and hope to lose."

The conversation was continued much longer; but its results will suffice our purposes, contained in the closing directions of Brandon.

"You are watched here, as far as is possible, at every step. Your mulatto porter, Andres, and your chambermaid, are both spies upon you. It is possible that your cook and coachman are both in the league against you. To guard against all of these, and other persons, have all my precautions been taken. My training as a woodsman has taught me a sort of forest strategy which has been very useful to *me* in city life, strange as it may appear. I, too, have my spies upon you. Scarcely ever do you leave your house, but Andres disappears also. He goes ever in the same direction. He visits, on such occasions, always the same person."

"Who is that?"

"Not yet! It is not yet time for you to know. But such is the case, and I know that Andres and

your girl have an understanding in regard to this matter. I thought it likely that the ghost would find some human allies who would openly approach you with exhortations against me and my sister. But, it is evident that they feel the ground to be too dangerous. They will attempt nothing openly, and we have only to guard against their secret operations. They will now hardly oppose directly any of your purposes, if expressed boldly on your part, as purposes entirely determined. You must now prepare for a visit to your plantation. Go for a week. Let your servants, and all others who seek you, hear of your design. Have no reserves about it. Your health has suffered —you need change of air—you will recruit for a week or so in the country. Set out as soon as possible. Carry all your servants with you. This will in some degree satisfy the ghost of the safety of your movements, since these are, all of them, the spies which he keeps upon you. He will look to them to report of the first danger arising from your meeting with me. We will *not* meet; and the better to disarm their suspicions, you will exhibit to them the most invariable despondency and affliction. This is what they look to see as the proper fruits of their operations. Before you go, however, you must sign this paper which I have prepared. Read it. You will see that it contains a full authority for me to take possession and have the charge of your house during your absence. It is barely possible that I may have to assert this authority and to show this paper. I will not do so unless it shall become necessary to justify myself for

being found there; an event which I will do my best to guard against."

Here the conference ended; the parties soon separated; and in two days after, Marie de Berniere suddenly left town for her plantation residence.

CHAPTER XVI.

MEANWHILE, Frederick Brandon was busy making all the necessary preparations for the further object which he had in view. As soon as Marie de Berniere had left the city, he came to me.

"This very night, William, we begin our explorations. I feel that they will not be in vain. Our antagonist can do nothing to prevent us now. It is only necessary that we choose our time with reference to his employment elsewhere; and, fortunately, I am in a situation to know where he is at certain moments."

"But who is he, Fred?"

"Wait, William. We shall know something more —perhaps all—this very night. Look at these keys. They give us access to the dwelling of Marie. See this box and bag. They contain my probes and instruments for penetrating secret places. I pride myself on my faculty that way. You must assist me in carrying my tools. You will take the bag and I the box. At nine to-night we must enter our new lodgings. My adversary is anxious, but he can do nothing more."

"How do you know that he is anxious?"

"By instincts, such as ordinary people too much undervalue, but which were never given to us in vain. I *feel* that he is anxious. I *know* that he is now disarmed. Perhaps I conjecture his anxiety by the deportment of his agents. I saw old Andres, and the chamber-maid of Marie this morning as they followed their mistress. They did not see me, and I could watch them at pleasure. They had the look of persons thoroughly bewildered. Marie whispered to my sister, just as they were about to separate, that she was earnestly urged not to leave town. But the dear woman was firm. They fear that we shall meet elsewhere—they feel, or rather their secret tutor feels that, *out of that house*, he can no longer raise the ghost at pleasure."

After a little further conversation, which I need not report, Frederick once more disappeared. With dark, he returned, bringing some small articles with him, which he did not show to me. He was in excellent spirits. Doing or contemplating work, he had the energy and eye of an eagle; and his conversation rose frequently into passionate bursts of eloquence. A wonderful capacity for labor and a rare enthusiasm of temperament were his great secrets, in connection with a quality of calm, calculating thought, which is quite as rare in such association. At the appointed time we sat out for the region devoted to exploration—I carrying the bag, he the box and some small bundles, all concealed under our cloaks. The night was sufficiently dark to cover our move-

ments. It was cloudy, the streets were imperfectly lighted; this was not a trading portion of the city; and, in the short space between our house and that of Madame de Berniere, we met nobody. The key was applied to the outer door and fitted to a charm. We were soon sheltered within the gloomy and mysterious edifice, which I have already described as a double house, large, lofty, and of antique character. It was probably one of the very oldest fabrics of this already ancient city. Having secured the door behind us, we laid down our burdens, and prepared to strike a light; an operation which, in these days of locofocoism, would be pronounced a very tedious one, working, as we did, with the old implements, flint and steel, and tinder-box. We had with us a dark lantern, which soon gave us a certain, though a feeble guidance. As soon as the light was fairly kindled, and before taking another step, Frederick proceeded to thrust a steel awl into the wood of the outer entrance, just above the bolt of the lock, so that nobody could enter from without even if in possession of a key. Our key we had taken out of the lock as soon as the door was made fast.

"We must provide, in this way, that no one shall surprise us."

The same precautions, I may as well mention, were taken in regard to every door through which we passed.

"The communications between the several rooms," said Frederick, "may not be by secret avenues. We

must guard against the enemy coming upon us through the ordinary passages."

We found ourselves, as soon as the lamp was lighted, in the great hall of the building, constituting the first entrance from the street. It was a long, rather broad, and lofty passage, at the lower end of which the stair-flight wound upward through the building. The floor was of dingy white-marble slabs, not a little worn. Frederick made me remark the fact that the wall was lined and panelled throughout with black cypress, instead of being plastered; the panelling was heavy, with great massive mouldings of wood, while the stair-flight left no space beneath, but was closed in, and seemed to form a spacious closet, or series of closets, all of which was done in a heavy panelling, the same as the wall. We tried at these apparent closets, and found one of them partly open. It was a crypt, employed for hanging up cloaks, hats, umbrellas, &c.; the pegs still bore some articles, apparently of servants' clothing. There was evidently space for several other closets, though we found but one more, and that was locked.

"We may examine these hereafter," said Frederick. "How deep that closet may go, is a question. But, though we see, apparently, all the space accounted for, yet it is surprising how much may still really be concealed from the most inquiring eye, unless submitted to tests of actual measurement. Let us first secure this back door, and then ascend to the chamber. It is there that we must seek the secret."

We drove another little spear of steel over the bolt

of the lock, so as to prevent its motion, and then moved up the massive stairway. It creaked beneath our steps, and the slight sound, suddenly made in the silence of that dim, ancient, and (as alleged) haunted habitation, stirred my heart with a disquieting sensation. But we went forward boldly, and as rapidly as we could under the guidance of our dark lantern. On reaching the second floor, Frederick bade me observe that the walls continued to be heavily panelled as below; but we did not linger to examine them. My companion, at once fitting his key, led the way into the chamber of Marie de Berniere. It was a spacious and beautifully furnished apartment, hung with great mirrors, and graced with several old cabinet pictures, all French, and from the hands of eminent painters. Our light did not suffice for their examination, nor had we the leisure for this purpose. But it was evident that Frederick surveyed the scene with a deep, as with a silent, interest. The mirror before which the beloved object attires and adorns her person, the bath which purely receives her pure and lovely form, the couch on which she dreams of innocent happiness —these can never be beheld by a noble-hearted lover, without awakening the most sweet and touching emotions. Frederick held up the lamp and looked around him without a word, but with evident curiosity and a full heart. At length, he spoke—

"My poor Marie! What has she not been compelled to endure in this place—a place in which luxury and taste have equally striven to secure her happiness. It is for me, and because of me, that she has

been made to suffer so much. I would die to relieve her of this sorrow, William. She loves me—*that* I feel. Here, she has prayed for me, wept for me, dreamed of me."

His voice faltered. I fancied that I could see a big tear gathering in his eye, but he turned from me at the moment.

"Love," he continued—"tears—are not inconsistent with manhood. I feel that I am a strong man; yet, as I love, I am more assured of my manhood from the earnestness and strength of the passion of tenderness which fills my soul whenever I hear her name, whenever the tender thought tells me of her. How weak is the heart which cannot love. It confounds a brutal insensibility with strength, and is only coarse and unfeeling—not, in fact, human—when it fancies itself strong."

We now proceeded diligently to our task. Our bag and box were opened. They were filled with a variety of instruments, such as I had never before seen, and the uses of which, at first, I did not know. Some of them were instruments for measurement; others were slender steel probes for sounding and penetrating cavities. There were compasses, and squares, and saws of particularly delicate make, such as the surgeons use. There were also long and broad knife-blades, of singular thinness, which could be made to pass between the joints of planks without widening their crevices. The uses of all these I had occasion to learn as we proceeded.

"This, if you recollect, William, was the chamber in

which the Egyptian first made his appearance. That night, Marie must have transferred her couch to an upper room. This apartment was partly given up to the guests. It was probably designed as a retiring room for the ladies. That door, which opens behind the stair-flight, and conducts, through a closed passage, to the chief saloon, was locked, if you remember, when we tried it, fancying that the Egyptian might have escaped that way. It leads, also, through the same passage, to a door which opens on the veranda, as well as to the one that conducts to the saloon. The veranda was closed in with canvas, and we entered it through the door of the passage, but only from the opposite apartment. There is a private stair-way, I fancy, leading from the same passage. It was through the door which we entered to-night, that we followed the Egyptian into this chamber. I am satisfied that he did not escape by the passage. We must look elsewhere for his mode of disappearance."

"Always supposing that he was no ghost."

"Of that *I* am quite satisfied," was the cool response. He continued,—

"Now see. His approach is always announced by a sound of sighing, and by a cold breath of air. You see where her bed stands. She can hear this sighing sound where she lies; she also feels the cold breath in the same place. It follows that the door which opens upon her, the draught from which she feels, must be tolerably near. It might be from the passage, yet, as that door was fast locked, and the key on this side,

when the Egyptian escaped us, I take it for granted that the sighing and breathing do not come from that quarter. It is most likely to arise from the opposite side, on which the chimney stands. The distance from the couch to this wall is about ten feet—an easy distance. The fireplace, you perceive, is one of an ancient fashion, very deep, and designed for enormous wood fires. But deep as it is, and broad, you will yet perceive that it bears no sort of relation to the immense breadth of surface which the chimney itself occupies. There is a space here, on one side, you perceive, of more than two feet; on the other, of little more than fourteen inches. Why this difference? Let us now measure the depth of the fireplace, which, you see, is very great, and must have consumed a very enormous and unnecessary quantity of fuel. You see the depth? Compare this depth with that of the walls on each side of the chimney. They are not one-half as much recessed, yet the outer wall of the chimney must necessarily be panelled with that of the rest of the house. Assuming this panelling to be directly against the bricks, and the thickness of the wall far exceeds any that we build in modern times, involving a prodigious waste of material, and quite unnecessary, unless the purpose was to build a fortress, and prepare against cannon. This is not likely. This wall is hollow. Now, walls should be made hollow in a moist climate. It might be well, as a matter of charity, that free avenues should be given to the rats. I think it only good taste to have rats in a large, old dwelling; but the hollows here are quite too large, and the first

laws of art require the recognition of economy of space and material as vital principles. There is no hodman so obtuse as not to know this. Here, then, in this immediate neighborhood, lies our mystery. Let us now examine this heavy panelling, which you perceive is richly wrought in black cypress, with heavy mouldings, extending not only over the whole face of the wall, but from the mantle up to the ceiling, over the whole front of the fireplace. Let us see if there be anything peculiar in this moulding. What do you perceive?"

I looked with all my eyes; but everything seemed uniform. I could see no part which differed from the rest.

"The joinery," said Frederick, resuming—"has been well done. But the design of the panelling, you will perceive, is clumsy and tasteless, showing a striking contrast between the merits of the plan and the execution. In other words, the person who could execute such neat work, ought to have designed a more pleasing form of panelling. You will perceive that the sections of the panels are oblong and rather narrow, while the dividing plates between each pair of panels are broad and massive. You will also note that there is but one grand horizontal dividing line of plate, belting the wall, and separating the panels; making two sets only in a wall fully twelve feet high. Thus, we have the panels about two feet in width, to six feet in height. There is, as you see, no wainscot, unless the central belt of plate, which is six feet from the floor, can be so considered. Now, then, if we could

open one of these panels, we should find the aperture to be just about six feet high, by two feet and a few inches broad, a width quite sufficient for the passage of any ordinary man. If there be such an opening, it must open *inwardly*, the plates dividing the panels effectually preventing it from opening *outwards;* besides, such a mode of opening would reveal seams and hinges. As good taste and beauty have not been subserved by this plan of panelling, we must look for some other motive. I have shown you one. I am persuaded that these plates cover a secret door, and that it is in close proximity to this chimney. The question now is, how to find it out?"

"How will you proceed?"

"The laws are quite simple in all such cases. To find the whereabouts of a secret passage, closet, case, or drawer, you have only to find a certain space which is obviously unemployed and unaccounted for. To look for obstruction is the next object. If there be a door here, of the dimensions I speak of, it must be independent of the lower and the upper plates crossing the panels. The lower plate, as you perceive, runs along the floor, forming its moulding; in other words, the washboard. It is to be remarked that the paint is uniform throughout. The common practice is to give the washboard a different color from the wall. But this, being a legitimate part of the panelling, has been justifiably excepted from the rule. Now this door, wherever it is, must work freely of the washboard and of the upper plate, six feet above. If much used, unless the work were admirably done, it might, under

a better light than ours, betray its seams; but our easier course will be, not wasting time and eyesight, to probe our way along with our instruments."

We did so. I held the lantern; and, with his thin spatula, my friend, on his knees, proceeded to insinuate the blade between the heavy plate-moulding, and the rest of the panel. He commenced at the fireplace, working backwards, to the rear of the building. After a few moments, he said—

"It is here! I was sure of it! I have not been mistaken! It is the very first panel adjoining the fireplace. You see, William, as I pass the knife down to the floor a depth of six inches, the width of the lower plate, or washboard, I find no obstruction the whole width of the panel?"

I noted the proceeding.

"Now," said he, "let us mount these chairs, and probe the corresponding plate above. If that offers no obstruction, we may be assured of what we seek."

This was done. The result corresponded entirely to what we had discovered below. The spatula worked free of obstruction.

"Now, then, our difficulties begin. We must now find out where the hinges are, and how the door is secured in the rear. In all probability, it is connected with some spring, which may be beneath the floor, or in the side of the fireplace; possibly in the wall, concealed somewhere in the panelling. What are the conditions of such a secret? The first is *concealment.* The second is *facility.* It must be of such a nature as not readily to be found; and yet it must be con-

venient to the hand, or the foot, of him who seeks egress. Such springs are usually small, and they are correspondingly feeble. To work efficiently, they must be as near as possible to the door upon which they operate, and whose hinges they influence. If we can find the hinges, we can find the fastenings. They must be opposite to the hinges. If we find the fastenings, we know in what direction to look for the secret springs."

Thus saying, Frederick proceeded with a large spatula to feel his way along the perpendicular lines of panel.

"A secret which is suspected to exist," said he, as he worked, "is already more than half revealed. Take this knife into your hand. Press it as I do. Do you feel the hard obstruction here?"

"I do."

"It is the upper hinge. There are probably three. Come down to the middle one; or—let me have the knife, and hold the lantern. I am more practised in this sort of experiment."

It was not long before the knife was again held by the obstruction. I again felt it. It was evidently metallic, and hard. I could make it sound, with a slight effort with the blade. A third trial brought us to the third hinge, which was probably a full inch below the lower plate, or washboard.

"Here, then, we have the hinges. The fastening is necessarily opposite, and against the chimney. Now comes our most tedious scrutiny. It must be concealed somewhere in the panelling of the mantle-

piece. It must lie within convenient reach, yet must not attract the eye. It lies probably in some partially apparent nail-hole, or in some seam near the corner, or it may be among the tiles which line the side of the fireplace. Our first process will be to feel for an obstruction on the opposite side."

His spatula was employed, but none was felt. But it was quite enough for Frederick, that he found the knife-blade to work with comparative freedom up and down, everywhere, except in one place.

"You see," he observed, "that it binds *here*. This is about four feet from the floor, and tolerably convenient to the hand. That we feel no other obstruction than the binding of the wood, is conclusive to me that the spring is in the rear of the door, working like a bolt, against it. This leads me to the conclusion that it is to be found by operating from the fireplace. Give me the lantern."

Throwing fully open the door of the lantern, so that the light should be as ample as it could afford, Frederick kneeled upon the hearth, never troubling himself with fear of soot and ashes, and thrust his head and light into the vaulted chimney-place. Here he worked for some time with patience and in silence. At length he called me.

"I fancy I have found it. Look you here. Here —let me guide your finger. Do you feel a small cavity like a two-inch auger-hole ?"

I did. It was on the side of the fireplace next the secret door, and just behind, in the angle of the cross-piece of marble which ran directly over the fireplace.

"You perceive," said he, "that once know where the opening lies, and a person standing outside cannot miss it. Stand without now, on the corner of the fireplace, and thrust your fore-finger firmly into this crevice."

I obeyed him. A slight clicking sound was heard as I did so.

"Look," said he, "does the door open?"

It stood wide, but dark, before me, while the light was still in Frederick's hands and up the chimney. I saw nothing; and so silently had the well-oiled hinges and the spring performed their office, that I had never suspected the result. It was only when I attempted to pass my hand over the panelling that I found the vacant space. Frederick did not immediately leave the fireplace after I made my report. He was employed, with a probe, feeling the secret opening, and examining the opposite side of the wall also. Certainly, he was the most remarkably cool person in the world, having, at the same time, such powerful passions. He exhibited no sort of surprise at the result. In fact, he had calculated on it as confidently as on a solved problem. When he came forth, he proceeded to inspect the opening, about which, as I had never seen a secret door, or any similar machinery, I was excessively curious. The lantern was thrust into the recess, and Frederick—peering eagerly, all the while, over his shoulder—examined it closely, looking particularly to the flooring of the recess. The space was just sufficiently wide for the entrance of a single person. It was ample for this purpose. Kneeling

down, Frederick felt around the floor of the closet. He drew my attention to the fact that it was separated entirely from the walls around it; was separated equally from the floor of the chamber, and from the beams of the dwelling. He next showed me four stout cords, fully an inch in diameter, working in grooves against the chimney; and the opposite wall, which was of plank, smoothed, but not panelled as in that of the chamber. Standing upon a chair, he discovered the tackle and pulleys above, and a stouter rope connected with them, the end of which was passed down through a central groove in the chimney, which, in the centre, was perpendicularly recessed so as to afford additional space to the person within the cavity.

"The rope," said he, "finds its way to the lower story, by which the ghost works his way up. This accounts for the sighing sound which precedes his appearance, and forms one of the spiritual influences operating upon the imagination of my poor Marie. The other mysterious influence is that cold breath, which, you perceive, must be the draught wholly occasioned by the opening of this door. You perceive, William, that here we have a square box, in which a good-sized man may comfortably stand. But, clearly, there is much more space to be accounted for. There is still some eight feet in length, from this partition of plank to the outer wall, in the rear of the building; as the walls of this and the other house necessarily lie squarely and parallel to each other. This being inevitable, it is probable that another door lies in that plank partition. That must inwardly open,

and the fastening, therefore, must be on this side. Let us look for it. Let me have the lantern."

After a brief search he called to me.

"See here; the very hinges are apparent on this side. The work has been rudely done. Indeed, the whole machinery exhibits but a humble condition of art. It would not long have baffled any individual at all curious or accustomed to such investigations. Now for the fastenings, which must lie somewhere in this neighborhood."

It required but little painstaking to discover the thin bolt of steel, working in a groove of the plank, which was employed to secure the door of the recess. Barely passing his hand over the region where he suspected it to lie, Frederick discovered and tried it. The aperture at once unfolded itself to his gaze. Thrusting the lantern into this closet, for such it was, it was discovered to contain a small table, which completely crossed the space, just leaving sufficient room for the swinging of the door. Frederick passed into the closet, and in a moment after said to me—

"Here is a discovery with a vengeance. Here is the ghost himself. Here is his mask of death, the frightful face of mortality and Colonel de Berniere—here is the Egyptian garment with which the scoundrel simulated me at the ball, and here are sundry other matters, the uses of which I do not so readily perceive."

These were held up to me, one by one, at the entrance, as the space would not suffer both of us to enter. The secret was thus far conclusively discovered,

and the pretensions of the ghost thoroughly laid at rest—so far as *we* were concerned. Frederick made other discoveries, but we need not linger in detailing them, as they were all simply dependent upon the main facts in our possession. Emerging from the inner recess, and carefully closing the door behind him, Frederick paused for a few moments, as if for rest and reflection. At length he said—

"It is now necessary that I should go below, and see from what sort of Tartarus our afflicted ghost emerges nightly. To do this, however, is not so easy. It will give us some work, though I have provided, in some degree, against the necessity. You perceive that the ghost works his way up, planted upon this board or floor, by means of these short ropes, which hang within the grooves in the chimney. These four smaller ropes are connected above, as you perceive, with four slender arms of iron, which meet in the centre, and are held up by a bolt and tackle fixed in the ceiling overhead. The thicker ropes find their way below, where they are fastened, until the ghost ascends, when he brings with him that by which he has worked his way, and secures it, until he desires to return, by a loop (which is measured carefully in the rope, so as to bring this footboard level with the floor) to this iron spike, which lies, as you see, conveniently, here in the corner. Now, as this great rope is made fast below, the question is, how shall we get at it, or in other words, be able to descend?"

For this difficulty I was utterly unprepared; but it

was otherwise with my friend. He smiled at the blankness of my visage, and said—

"The process is a simple one—simply, by substituting one rope for another, and shipping that by which the tackle is worked at present."

With these words he drew from his bag a small coil of rope, suitable to the purpose. He had provided against the contingency which he had fully anticipated. Standing on a chair, which the floor of the closet could barely sustain, he worked overhead with the dexterity of a sailor. He soon fastened the rope, which he brought, to the centre of the iron arms to which the four smaller ropes of the machine were suspended, passed the cords through the grooves of the block, and threw the ends to me. Coming down from the chair, we secured it, with proper tension, to the spike, leaving the drooping ends below; then reascending, he fairly divided with his knife the rope by which the machine was formerly sustained. But he did not suffer it to slide below. On the contrary, his purpose was to splice it above, and once more restore it, as it had been, as soon as his own survey below was complete, and he had effected all his objects. His arrangements made, he dropped the ends of his rope through the groove in the chimney, along with that in former use; and taking with him the lantern, between his feet, standing upright, proceeded to let himself down. There was now no obstruction, and the machine gradually sank with him. For the first foot of its movement, we heard the sigh-

ing sound of the rope very distinctly. We heard no other sounds, for it was now discovered that the face of the wall, all around, had been lined with woollen stripes, which effectually prevented the chafing of the wooden frame against the sides. Once down, Frederick drew up the platform, upon which I descended in like manner. We found ourselves in a deep damp cell, floored with brick, several feet below the basement story of the dwelling; which, by the way, was raised some three feet above the surface of the ground. Immediately beside us, as we descended, we discovered that the lower story was penetrable precisely as the upper—a discovery which, as we were also easily enabled to find the means of entrance from below, made our future proceedings comparatively easy. But our researches did not stop here. Pursuing them with earnestness, we found an outlet, by an arched way, under ground, conducting from the dwelling, through the garden, and into the precincts of other habitations. There we followed, through damp, dark avenues, snails and worms lying in our path, and glimmering upon the walls, which were coated with damp and slime. Our discoveries were wonderful; and we found that we could make our way into the other dwellings, fully fifty yards distant, by means precisely similar to those by which the ghost had entered that of Madame de Berniere. Frederick took good note of these avenues, which he conceived to have been the work of the Spaniards, when they held possession of the city, and that they showed traces of

the Spanish Inquisition.* But we must not linger. Having followed our labyrinths as far as they seemed to lead, showing us the connecting links between several houses, we returned, and once more reascended to the secret closet opening upon the chamber of Madame de Berniere. While here, Frederick Brandon said to me—

"You think we have seen all; but look here. Do you not see that there is no brick wall connecting with the chimney of the adjoining house? Do you not perceive that the wall of the adjoining house, as opposed to our eye, is of wood, and corresponds exactly with that opening to the chamber of Madame de Berniere? Be assured, it is penetrable in the same manner, and we shall be able easily to find the fastening."

He did so, and was about to press the spring, when he paused.

"The adjoining dwelling is a school-house—a school for young ladies. It is occupied by an ancient maiden lady, who is one of the teachers. It will be an awkward thing if I open upon her chamber; and should she detect me, the presumption will be against us with regard to the use of these secret passages!"

He paused for consideration, but after a little while said—

* Subterranean passages, like those described, have been found by the pulling down of houses, in New Orleans, within very few years; and, by the press of that city, have been ascribed to this origin.

"I will risk it. I must get all the clues to this infernal machinery."

He did so, and found himself in a school-room, filled with desks and benches; books lay about confusedly, and it was evident that the room had been only recently employed for the purposes of instruction. Nobody was to be seen. The house was wrapped in the most death-like silence. Frederick did not pursue his researches in this quarter.

"Enough," said he, "for the present. We may find it necessary hereafter to look further. We have done work enough for the night. These two houses were evidently built at the same time. They were probably owned by the same proprietor. They are very old—I should think among the oldest of the permanent abodes of New Orleans. They may have had a common purpose; but these are not proper inquiries at this moment. We have now other matters to engage our attention. But before we proceed further, let us have some refreshments. I am positively wearied."

Our box afforded us some eatables and a flask of wine. Frederick ate very heartily, and drank freely.

"I must eat and drink," said he, "whenever engaged on such labors as have lately troubled me. For twenty-four hours at a time, when thus employed, I can eat nothing; but the moment I reach a certain stand-point in my progress, where I can look and feel that my feet may be surely put down—when, in fact, conjecture becomes conviction—then my appetite

comes back to me, and I have the vigor of a score of Indians on a long scout."

He did eminent justice to our repast. This over, he said—

"Now, William, the question is, what is to be done with this ghost? Simply to lay him, will not answer. I confess, my feeling is such as inclines me rather to *lay him out!* When I think of the suffering he has caused my poor Marie, to say nothing of myself, and of that base and selfish malignity which has made him labor to destroy all our hope and happiness in the future, I feel that I could put him to death with as little remorse as I would crush the adder who awaits me in the pathway. I have been thinking that it would be a proper plan to take him in the very act of villany, and make a ghost of him in fact. It seems his ambition to appear one, and it would be retributive justice only to make him so in reality."

"But who is he, Frederick? You know him!"

"Yes, as well as I can know anything which, perfectly assured of, one yet lacks the necessary proofs. But the question is not, who is he? Let him perish, if he so pleases, without a name. It is no crime, surely, to kill a ghost. A crime is committed in the dark, the criminal unseen, unknown; but the bolt falls truly, nevertheless, since it is at the moment when his crime is doing; and it is only when judgment is over, and execution done, that you hold the light to his face to ascertain whose dog it is that has been shot. Now can I so arrange it that this scoundrel shall be taken and executed at the very moment when he is about to

play the deceased husband in my lady's chamber—the mask of death upon his face, the robes of the grave about his limbs—tricked out to the full in all his ugly and accursed devices? I could so manage the ropes that he pulls, that he should draw the noose about his own neck, inextricably, and lose all power of escape with the very efforts which he makes to do so."

"Can you do so?" I asked.

"Easily. I can work such a snare as shall halter and hold him suspended in his secret closet."

"Do it!" I answered thoughtlessly: "It will be poetical justice, if not common law."

But Frederick shook his head.

"He would deserve it, truly; and it would be only an appropriate form of justice; but, as I think of Marie, I dare not. The horror of such a sight, and such a thought, even if she did not behold the sight, would never depart from her imagination. It would be a deadly spectre forever before her eyes. *My* passions—could I think of myself only—would, I feel, prompt me to something of the kind. But, remembering *her*, I must content myself with detecting and exposing the wretch!—Nay, I dare not even expose him—except to herself, and possibly to one other besides yourself."

"Indeed! And why not?"

"For the best reasons. If my suspicions are rightly entertained, the ghost is no other than Father Paul Roquetti, Marie's confessor!"

"Is it possible!"

"I am sure of it! I felt sure of it from the first.

I knew that he was my enemy on the first occasion when we met; and the proofs have been accumulating ever since. Marie is a devout Catholic; will be slow to believe even in the errors of some of its priesthood; and will dread lest the world should confound him with his church; an error of judgment of which the world is too commonly guilty. I must guard against giving her pain, and my discovery, though rendered perfectly conclusive in her eyes, must yet forbear exposing the offender to any unnecessary shame."

"But you do not mean to say that the scoundrel shall escape entirely?"

"Far from it. But I do not mean to punish him myself, or to make him suffer the penalties of the law. The secular arm shall not touch his head, if the ecclesiastical authority will take up the matter honestly. That the Catholic Church here is quite prepared to do so, I am satisfied. The venerable head of it, in this place, is too wise and too good a man to suffer the offender to escape through any idle fear that his sins will be visited upon the church to which he belongs. Priests are but men. They err, like all of us. They have the same passions and infirmities—they are even more exposed to temptation. Heaven knows what a host of priestly offenders are every day published in our newspapers, from all the Protestant churches in the country. But who thinks of charging the faith with the faults of the priesthood?"

"And what now?" said I, seeing Frederick moving to the secret passage.

"I will not snare him by the neck, William, but I

will so contrive my snares as to leave him without escape. But I can do no more to-night. It nears the small hours. I will but put things as I found them, and pick up and remove my own traps. After that, we will depart. We shall lodge together."

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

We reached our lodgings, carrying our bag and box, without meeting anybody. We swallowed a bowl of coffee each, on our return, and Frederick soon after tumbled into bed. Spite of the coffee, which had been made strong, he was instantly asleep, and slept like a top. I remained awake for two goodly hours, soliciting the friendly sleep in vain. But Frederick was awake with the dawn, and off. What he did that day I know not; but he was busy. At night he came again; and again, that night, we penetrated the dwelling of Marie, and the secret entrance. There, and about the house, we worked with continued industry for several goodly hours, making as little stir as possible, and studiously avoiding noise and loud talking. If we had occasion to use a hammer or to drive a nail, we covered hammer, nail, and board with woollen or cotton waddings. I need not now tell you what was done. Enough that we put certain wires in motion, by which to secure the ghost, though not to in

jure him. We also contrived secret places of hiding for other parties, should these become necessary to our purposes. All these proceedings were not effected, however, in a single night. It took us several, before we had finished our work; and much of the work—all, in fact, that could be accomplished abroad, was done elsewhere during the day. Frederick worked like a hero; as none, indeed, but a hero or a genius can work. His whole soul was in his performance, and this is the one secret only which makes performance successful. His cheerfulness amounted to enthusiasm; so that, when most intensely at work, his spirits seemed most happily at play, his fancy luxuriating in the most grateful wantonness, and his moods never once putting on the aspect of a care. And in this temper lies the secret of the best work always. It is the mule-nature that goes doggedly to its tasks. Such a nature may suffice for turning a mill, but not for glorious or great achievement.

All his preparations completed for the proper reception of the ghost, the next step of Frederick Brandon was to recall Marie de Berniere from her plantation to her town residence; and then to compel the spectre to reappear. To effect these objects, he prepared to dispatch his sister, Madame de Chateauneuve, on a visit to his betrothed. But watched as was the latter, it was necessary that certain precautions should be taken, even for this object, by which to avoid all suspicion of what was in hand; and, in fact, to direct the doubts of the enemy to a wholly different quarter. Accordingly, Frederick set to work to compose a letter

to Marie, which I was permitted to read as he wrote. It ran thus:—

"How I rejoice, dearest Marie, that the advice of my sister has been productive of such beneficial effects —that your health improves, and that your mind is again recovering its freedom from the painful effects of its strange unhappy hallucinations. I was well assured, from the first, that a disordered imagination, and a highly excited state of your nervous system, were the true secrets of your suffering, and that the vulgar trick of some artful and malicious rival, co-operating with the diseased state of your mind, has been the real secret of the unnatural events which have disturbed you. You perceive, as I told you, the pure air of the country has been in the last degree beneficial. You have had no dreadful visions. Your imagination has conjured up no terrible phantoms. Henceforth, I doubt not that you will be entirely free from annoyance. The privilege which your love so generously gives me, of protecting you for the future, with the sacred rights of a husband, while it makes my happiness complete, will make your peace secure. And shall we not both of us, dear Marie, be eminently happy? Need I repeat to you the assurance that I shall live mostly for this object? Need I repeat the asseverations of a love which you should by this time sufficiently understand, and your faith in which prompts you now so graciously to consent to my prayers and desire? You have made me happy by this consent. Oh! dearest Marie, return soon to the city, that our marriage may no longer be delayed.

My sister, who has just brought me your precious billet, will bring you this. Let me entreat you, if your health and composure be sufficiently restored, to take advantage of her companionship, and return with her."

Such was the tenor of the letter. I have only given such portions of it as were written with an object other than that simply of addressing the affections and sensibilities of his betrothed. He designed much of the preceding for other eyes than those of Marie, and Madame de Chateauneuve had her instructions, which were to be conveyed to the former, so to dispose of the letter as that it should be quite accessible to all or any of the servants. She was also to be counselled to let several days elapse, after receiving it, before she offered to act on its chief suggestion by returning to the city.

"We must allow the enemy sufficient time. You will perceive, William, that much depends upon our being able to compel the ghost to reappear. We must fully convict him."

I thought he elaborated too much. I said so.

"You surely have sufficient evidence for this purpose already—the secret door and passage—the mask and death—the disguise of the Egyptian—"

"This is the too common error. People are too apt to fire the train before they are quite sure that the enemy is decidedly over the mine. Most failures come from precipitance, and the feeble eagerness of the parties. In all cases, particularly of this sort, the proper rule is 'to *mak*' sicker'—to guard against every possibility of failure—to leave no contingency

unprovided for—to leave to the enemy no aperture for evasion. It is scarcely possible so to secure any game, where you contend against great ingenuity working in secret. That we have so far succeeded, is due entirely to the fact that *we* have worked in secret; and that our first move was utterly to disarm the suspicion that we worked at all. In dealing with an imagination so vivid as that of Marie's, a nervous system so susceptible, a spiritual mood whose native tendency, earnest and enthusiastic, is to religion, we are particularly required to meet every point of evasion which an ingenious and subtle fancy might, by possibility, suggest. Superstition, once in full possession of the imagination, utterly possesses the understanding, and precludes reason from entering at all; and it is surprising, when thus possessed, how ingenious it becomes in keeping itself in possession. Do you not see that, if I use only the proofs which we now have, we prove nothing really against the criminal: we show that she has been deceived and deluded, but do not show by whom; and nothing has been done to drive this secret and powerful enemy from her councils, where he has indirectly ruled for possibly fifteen years—ever since her childhood? Besides, my dear fellow, what should prevent the ingenious superstition, and even the ingenious affection of Marie, from saying: 'Ah! Frederick loves me, and would wish to cure me of my fears, to cure me for himself. He has provided this death-mask—he has placed this costume of the Egyptian here—he—' Who will prove that we did not put them there?"

"But she cannot, by any conjecture, charge you with the creation of this secret passage!"

"No! But she may possibly reason thus in respect to this secret passage, still under the bias of a superstition which is in full possession, and tenacious of its hold: 'Old houses, Frederick himself has told me, are not unfrequently thus provided with secret passages. He has suspected the presence of one in my house, which is one of the oldest of the old city; one of the most massive, and particularly susceptible of use in this manner. His conjecture has been verified by his search. But what then? This proves nothing against the spectre, unless you can show that, because a ghost is independent of such aids, he will scorn to appear in a dwelling which offers him such unnecessary facilities.' No doubt all this sort of reasoning is false; but it is natural in all such cases. If the heart of man is desperately wicked, the head is quite as desperately ingenious; and it is by sophistications wholly that superstitions can work upon cultivated minds. With the ignorant the case is otherwise. The instincts serve, and no argument is needed to prevail over the understanding; but with the intellectual and accomplished, subtleties, engendered by the mind—by education itself—take the place of common sense; and a false philosophy will clothe itself in the garments of an angel of light—a Gabriel in golden armor, seemingly impenetrable to any thrust from the Ithuriel spear skepticism. I have thought of all that is needful, I assure you, to make my case conclusive, and perfectly to reach the convictions of Marie; I must

take physical hold upon the ghost—I must shake the supernatural out of him—must take him, as Dunstan took the devil, fairly by the proboscis, and so tweak it as to make him roar like any ordinary mortal! And I will do it, be sure, with sufficient unction, as soon as I have a chance!"

"Well, if you will suffer me, I shall be pleased to be present at the operation. This taking a ghost by the nose, will be something of a novelty in our country. But when did you get the letter from Madame de Berniere, to which yours is the answer?"

"I have received no such letter. I expressly cautioned Marie not to write. Nor is my letter so much meant for her perusal, as for that of the ghost. That I have assumed so much, in writing as I have written, will be forgiven by Marie in consideration of the circumstances. On this head, I think she properly understands me; I have taken particular pains, in our conversations before she went, that she should do so. Of course, it is understood that her tacit acquiescence in what I have written binds her to nothing. It is understood that my proceeding is one designed for her extrication, for her freedom only from the ghost, and not her bondage to myself. It will be quite time to discuss the latter subject, when we have settled the former. But I have no fears of the result if I once succeed in my discoveries, and succeed in satisfying her. I have no doubt that the process of tweaking the nose of the ghost will be conclusive in respect to my claims to the hand of Marie."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WEEK had fully elapsed after this conversation, when one evening Frederick Brandon said to me:—

"My sister returned this morning to the city. Marie comes back to-morrow. And now, what say you to taking lodgings to-night with me at her house?"

"Agreed—to be sure."

"But let me warn you. Once there, we must stay there until the affair is over. We shall certainly have to remain there for this and the ensuing night. It may be longer. I cannot now venture the loss of a single hour. I must be in waiting and on the watch. I have contrived a hiding-place for both of us, where we shall escape notice, and from whence we may emerge at any moment. I have also laid in ample supplies of meat and drink, so that we shall not suffer. I have pass keys for every apartment. I can feel my way along every avenue. My sister will give to Marie all the necessary instructions. She has, as you are aware, only to pull a button which links unsuspiciously at the head of her bed, close against the wall, to give the alarm, in a moment, if she hears or sees the ghost. We shall have some wires to pull, the moment after. All this you know."

Under the cover of the night, loaded with provisions for several days, we made our way without interruption to the haunted dwelling. Our dark lantern was not forgotten, nor extra supplies of fuel. We found

our way to an ancient lumber closet, beneath the stairs, on the second story, which gave us a large recess, blocked in by old trunks, bandboxes, and furniture —a child's cradle, apparently of the time of Queen Elizabeth, black with age, and of the most antique fashion, being the prominent object. It had rocked the infant form of that very Colonel de Berniere whose sleepless spirit we had come to lay. Here we lay, rather snugly—somewhat fettered in our movements, but not uncomfortably so—and with the privilege of stealing out, whither we pleased, as soon as everybody was asleep. We adjusted our den in such a manner as to afford us equal ease and security. The place was one evidently which persons did not often appear to penetrate. Before taking possession of it, we went the rounds of the establishment—reviewed all the secret places—all the avenues—saw that everything wore its old aspect—tried all the keys to the secret doors, and felt that we could find egress and ingress when and where we pleased—and saw heedfully to the operation of the wire which we had conducted to the bedhead of the haunted lady. This done, we returned to our den among the bandboxes, opened wide the door of our lantern, so as to throw its light wholly upon the recess, clapped it on top of an old trunk looking inwards, and then proceeded to look to the contents of the two provision baskets which we had brought. These we stowed away in the cradle of the ghost, *i. e.*, when he was a mere mortal infant. His spectre did not affect our appetite. We had a good supply of red wines, which we used freely as a

substitute for tea and coffee, and with a couple of cloaks and blankets we made out to sleep lovingly together, with but little space for much changing of position through the night.

We woke some time after daylight, but it was still dark to us, except for the lamp-light, where we were. The lamp we had to keep burning, and occasionally to replenish. To strike a light, in the old times, when friction-matches were not, might have endangered our secret. A little after we had awakened, Frederick ventured out, but soon returned.

"They can't arrive," said he, "before mid-day, and the servants and carriage will come first. Marie will drive with my sister, and will bring her round in the evening, and take tea with her. We may be at ease till meridian. And now for our breakfast."

We ate, and walked about for awhile, but towards 11 o'clock A. M., thought it prudent, like sagacious rats, to take to our hole. We did so, and lay *perdu*. It was mid-day—fully one o'clock—when we heard a bustle below, and the loud voice of Andres, and the pert voice of the chamber-maid. The back door was then thrown open, and the cook went out to the kitchen, but soon returned. A long confabulation followed between the parties, the Betty of my lady concluding at last by a loud outcry for something to eat, declaring herself fairly famished, and utterly miserable from the vile country fare to which for the last two weeks she had been so cruelly and unnecessarily subjected. Meanwhile, Andres seemed to have absented himself. It was fully an hour before we

heard his voice again, and he came in just in time to join in taking dinner with the chamber-maid. Of this event we guessed the particulars from an occasional clashing of plates, and the smacking of a cork, which might have been porter, or, more probably, champagne. Good tastes may be acquired in the cellar quite as soon as in the parlor, and education, in a servant's hall, may sometimes cast discredit, in more ways than one, on the progress of civilization up stairs.

But feeding, like other good things, must have an end some time or other. The bustle below stairs ceased, and very soon we heard my lady's maid in my lady's chamber. There she bustled about for a goodly hour, her tongue earnestly engaged all the while in seeming soliloquy, though that of Andres might be heard as a sort of thorough-bass, giving force and dignity to her *affetuoso*. At intervals we could hear the movements of both the parties, with the drawing of tables, the rattling of chairs, and the evident scraping of the broom over walls and carpets. Our ears, in the almost total suspension of the exercise of our other senses, became singularly acute in our place of hiding. Here we remained undisturbed, almost unapproached. It was quite sunset by our watches when Marie de Berniere came home, accompanied by Madame de Chateauneuve. They went at once to the chamber of the former, where tea was served them. We could hear from our den the subdued murmur of their voices for a couple of hours more. But Madame de Chateauneuve at length took her departure. An hour elapsed and the house remained perfectly quiet.

Then the tongue of my lady's Betty was heard once more in the chamber. She was evidently assisting her mistress in disembarrassing her for the night. This duty seemed to be at length finished. The chamber door was heard to close. We heard it locked carefully within; and then the footsteps of the maid, ascending the stairs over our heads, on her way to her own sleeping-room in the third story. When this sound had fairly ceased, we were conscious of a noise —slight indeed, but to our keen senses sufficiently obvious—again at the door of Marie's chamber.

"She is withdrawing the key from the lock," said Frederick, "as I counselled her through my sister."

Frederick now carefully trimmed the lamp, shutting the door of it as soon as it was done. In the brief moments, when the light was cast upon his countenance, I saw that his face was very pale, but all the muscles were rigid, and the mouth was silently and firmly compressed. We had still, in all probability, some two hours to wait.

"Be patient," said my friend; "according to rule, ghosts have no right to revisit the glimpses of the moon till 12 o'clock. Midnight is the dawning for the spiritual world. What a reflection. They find life and light only when our mortal world is dark, and in a slumber that mocks the external attributes of death. Well, we shall see! We shall hear! It is something to reconcile us to such a tedious watch, that we may fairly grapple with a ghost."

"Should your conjectures and suspicions, after all,

prove unfounded—should there be a *real* ghost, Frederick!"

Darkness is wonderfully favorable to the marvellous. Credulity grows in just degree with our ignorance and incapacity. I should probably during the day, have never entertained or uttered such a suggestion.

"Can you suppose it possible, after our discoveries?" queried my friend. "Nay, it is possible, for I am not prepared to deny the possibility, or even the occurrence of the supernatural and spectral; but it surely is not a probability in the present case. At all events, it will not be very long before we are enabled to resolve doubts. Let but Marie be firm enough to do as she has been counselled, and only pull the wire, the button of which is behind her bolster, and we secure the visitor, shadowy or real. We shall be seasonably warned by our little metallic monitor."

He pointed to a little copper ball which hung beneath the stairs just above our heads. This, by the way, was connected by a wire with the button so conveniently placed by the couch of Madame de Berniere. The same button was connected by another wire, which we had conducted into the secret crypt through which the ghost was expected to enter the chamber. While the first wire, acting upon the bell, warned us of his entrance, the opposite wire was contrived in such a manner as effectually to prevent the working of the spring by which the ghost let himself out again—effectually barring his egress from the apartment. We had tried our machinery thoroughly, so as to

assure ourselves of its proper and prompt working at the moment of alarm.

I was silent after this, and stretched myself out as well as I could, leaning my back and head against the partition. Frederick felt the movement.

"If you are drowsy," said he, "indulge yourself. You will probably have time enough. The bell will waken you, and I can, at a moment, should it fail to do so."

But I disclaimed the desire, of which I was really mentally unconscious, and roused myself up for awhile; though now both of us remained silent. But nature had been a little too much overtaxed, in my case, as in that of my friend, and though sympathizing with him fervently, and really extremely anxious about the result, I yielded finally to that arch-beguiler, sleep, and closed eyes and senses wholly to the external world. I was awakened suddenly by Frederick's grasp upon my shoulder, and by the subsiding tinkle of the little bell within my ears. My faculties were all in hand in a moment. Frederick rose, his movements quite measured and necessarily deliberate. We both moved with caution, he leading the way, surmounting boxes and cradle, and without any casualty, we extricated ourselves, and emerged from the closet. I carried the lamp, Frederick the keys, and we proceeded at once, along the passage to the door of Marie's chamber. We heard a bustle as we proceeded; then came the sounds of Madame de Berniere's raised voice; but we heard no voice in reply. I opened the lantern door; and Frederick applied the key to the lock. It

opened readily—we pushed in without pausing, and, turning the key, relocked the door. We were fairly in the sacred chamber of youth, beauty, and innocence. The voice of Marie saluted us, something between a cry and a speech. What she said then I know not; but I saw her, sitting up in the bed, her eyes bright as two unsunned jewels of the mine, and her hand extended in the direction of the chimney. Then I deciphered her words.

"Save me, my friends. He is here! My enemy. He who pursues me. He has spoken to me—he has dared to threaten. He is here—there—he spoke to me from that direction."

She pointed towards the secret door. I had held the light towards it; but it was closed, and I saw nothing. Frederick, however, coolly took the lantern from my hand; and, going to the toilet, lighted the two waxen candles which stood upon it. The room was at once visible in every quarter. Still, I saw nobody. Frederick's face was fearfully pale; but he said nothing. His lips were rigidly caught by his teeth. I readily conjectured all his emotions. Everything depended upon this discovery. Should he have failed! Should there be no detection—no human victim—all the fancies, and the superstitions of the woman whom he so much loved, would be confirmed, fatally, to all his hopes. He seized one of the candles in his hand, raised it aloft, saw that the secret door was fully fastened, and at once proceeded to the chimney. A moment after, he laughed aloud, somewhat hysterically, and the next moment, thrusting the candle into my

hands, he stooped into the fireplace and drew down the ghost, by a pair of very well-made mortal legs, from the recesses of the chimney.

"Come out!" he said, with great deliberation. "You can hide no longer."

The spectre was reluctant. The vigorous grasp of Frederick assisted his movements, and dragged him from his hiding-place. He stood upon the hearth, speechless, immovable; and when I thrust the candle towards his face, the suspicions of my friend were all confirmed. There stood the living embodiment of the excellent father, Paul Roquetti!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE good father, this time, wore no death's head; but he carried it in his hand. He had evidently taken it from his face in the moment of alarm, and was so paralyzed by detection, that he had forgotten to drop it. He was a woeful picture, not only of idiotic confusion, but of soot and ashes. He wore motley for the nonce, and hardly needed a mask for concealment. He offered no resistance, as drawing a stout cord from his pocket, Frederick prepared to secure his arms behind him. But here Madame de Berniere interposed—

"Frederick, for my sake, spare him this—"

Frederick paused without answering, and looking with searching eyes into the face of the culprit, seemed to ask himself, by the brief examination, whether he

ought to, or could safely forbear the precaution which he had meditated.

"He is an Italian!" said he to me, in an under tone, but sufficiently loud for the Father to hear. The latter raised his eyes for the first time, but they sank almost instantly beneath the glance of my friend, as beneath that of a master.

"And this," said Frederick, "is one of a race that boasted such names as Scipio and Cicero, Cato and Julius Cæsar. How characteristics alter in a few centuries. Soul yields to sense, courage to subtlety, and the fearless and eager nature becomes the cold, the secret, the timid and assassin-like. And yet all these traits are found associated with genius and the rarest capacity for design. It is a mystery. We may trust him, I think"—looking searchingly into the priest's face—"but not out of sight. Hither."

The eye of Frederick seemed to indicate what he wished as well to myself as to Paul Roquetti. I opened the door of the chamber, and he followed me out like a submissive spaniel. Frederick came behind him, bringing one of the candles. The other was left with Madame de Berniere in her chamber. She now rose to make her toilet. Frederick placed his candle on the front window of the passage overlooking the street. He touched his repeater. It was two o'clock in the morning.

"We shall soon have visitors," said he; "the light is a signal."

By this time, the servant-maid had hurried from

above in her night-dress, aroused by the unavoidable bustle.

"In—to your mistress," said Frederick, sternly. "But first, go into that room"—pointing to the one opposite Madame de Berniere's chamber—"and bring us out some chairs."

There was no questioning that eagle glance, those stern simple tones with which he commanded her. She obeyed promptly, without a word, looking awfully distressed and inquiringly at the priest. She had scarcely placed the chairs, and entered the chamber of her lady, when we beheld Andres, the porter, making his way up. At the sight of him, Paul Roquetti looked towards him appealingly.

"Be seated, sir," said Frederick, in tones of command, rather than entreaty, pointing at the same time to one of the chairs. The person addressed obeyed instinctively. Meanwhile, Andres reached the top of the steps, on the same platform with ourselves. The fellow's face was dark with a savage expression, and his eye scowled fiercely.

"Down, sir," said Frederick, "and be in readiness to answer the door."

"I want to see my mistress," said the fellow, insolently, and continuing to advance.

"You do as I bid you—not a step further, I say."

"I must see my mistress." He pressed forward.

"See to the priest," said Frederick, and with the words, with but a bound, he sprang upon the mulatto, grasped him by the throat, wheeled him about, and plunged him headlong down the steps, just as the

scoundrel was drawing a knife from his bosom. The act was so decisive, the power with which it was executed so prodigious, that it seemed to operate upon the priest and negro like a sudden thunderbolt falling at their feet. Andres, prostrate for a moment on the first landing or platform of the stair-flight, bruised, half stunned, and rising slowly, was evidently cowed into submission. But he glared up at us, with one malignant flash of his dark and savage eyes, before he picked himself up, and continued, more deliberately, his downward progress.

"Bad blood, both. The mixture of the Spanish blood with that of the African produces always a malignant cross. We must keep a sharp eye on both."

At this moment the house-bell rung below, and the mulatto porter, obeying habit rather than will, was heard to open the outer door.

"It is my sister and Monsieur de Chateauneuve," said Frederick. "That candle has told them all."

The next moment we heard their voices, and they were soon on their way up stairs. Marie de Berniere emerged from her chamber at the same instant, and the parties met in the passage. Again Andres made his appearance coming up, but the vigilant eye of Frederick beheld him, and ordered him down again. The fellow did not venture to dispute the order; the taste which he had enjoyed of my friend's summary mode of enforcing obedience, was of excellent effect.

Of course, all was curiosity and inquiry—congratulations and exclamations. The impostor ghost sat

motionless with shame, in silence, a spectacle of loathing and reproach. Monsieur de Chateauneuve addressed him—

"So, so! good father, this is a beautiful game you have been playing. Ah, well! what have you to say for yourself?"

He was silent. Marie de Berniere then spoke, and her words betrayed the conflict between her indignation and sorrow.

"How, Father Paul, have I deserved this treatment at your hands? You who blessed me at birth, upon whose words I hung in childhood, to whom I looked as to a father; to whom I listened—to whom I made my confession."

The guilty man looked up, and his eye gleamed fiercely, as he replied, quickly—

"You did *not* confess!"

Monsieur de Chateauneuve promptly put in—

"And for a good reason. She had an instinct that told her you did not need it. No one need tell anything to the spy who steals all one's secrets. Satan! You would be a ghost—I have a mind to gratify you on the spot. If I only had a rope!"

We need not report all that was said on the occasion. Enough now that we give the substance of the events. A brief conversation aside, between Frederick and Monsieur de Chateauneuve, sent the latter off. He was gone about an hour. Meanwhile, the two ladies had retired to the chamber of Madame de Berniere, leaving Father Paul in the keeping of Frederick and myself. The fellow, Andres, made

several showings of himself upon the stairs, but was invariably arrested by the eye and voice of my friend, and driven back. Frederick, finally, as he became chafed at the pertinacity of the mulatto, pulled a pair of pistols from his coat, and sternly assured him that if he appeared again before he was summoned, he should be rewarded with an ounce of lead. The fellow respected the warning. Thus we remained for more than an hour, when at dawn a carriage drove up to the door. It opened, a bustle followed, and the venerable Archbishop D——, of the Roman Catholic Church—a person who united all the most amiable of social traits, with all that was pure and becoming in his station—who was equally beloved and honored by all sects and classes—ascended the stairs under the guidance of Monsieur de Chateauneuve. He stood before the culprit, his face filled with the sternest sorrow.

"Paul, you are guilty!"

The person addressed hung his head in silence. The Archbishop then spoke to Frederick, whom he had met before, and knew.

"Mr. Brandon, what is your wish and purpose? This man is a double offender—against the laws of the Church and those of the land. He is in your hands. I have not a word to say in his behalf. Let the laws of the land pronounce upon his offences. The Church will pronounce its judgments also."

But Frederick said, quickly—

"No, sir; he is in your hands. For this purpose, it was, not less than that a full exposure should be

made to you, that your presence was requested. Madame de Berniere would prefer, for her own sake, and that of the Church, which his connection dishonors, that the secular arm should forbear him. So far as he is concerned, I have done my duty. If I doubted that the Church would do its duty also, then only, would I deliver him to the justice of the country. But of this I have no doubt. Though not of your faith, reverend sir, I am too well satisfied that it is neither your policy nor wish to screen the offender. I resign him to your hands."

"Thanks, sir; you do me justice only. I thank you for myself and for the Church, which has not always been dealt with justly. Paul Roquetti, remain here. You will return with me."

At this moment, Madames de Berniere and Chateauneuve both emerged from the chamber, and were affectionately embraced by the venerable Archbishop. The former lady requested us now to enter the room, while Frederick laid bare the secret avenues within and beneath its walls.

"You will be confounded," said Frederick, "at the extent of these ramifications, and the wonderful power for harm which this man exercised."

"It is wonderful," said the Archbishop, "that such a power should be desirable to one so old. But, the love of power is, perhaps, the last of the passions to leave us."

We need not follow the party, as Frederick unfolded the secret avenues, and showed all the clues.

"What a ghost story our friend has spoiled!" said

Monsieur de Chateauneuve, tapping his snuffbox, and handing it to the Archbishop. When we returned to the place where the culprit had been left, he was gone!

The Archbishop was terribly angry, but his anger was unavailing. Andres was questioned, but he knew nothing. Frederick smiled, and said to the Archbishop—

"Do you know one Louise Porterier, living in the street ———— ?"

"Yes. She is a mulattress—"

"No—a Cuban. She is a *fruitier*, and has seven children. She is the wife of Paul Roquetti."

"Wife! Saints and angels, Mr. Brandon! what is it you tell me?"

"Truth! I have not been employing myself in vain for the last three weeks. I have fathomed this man's entire history. This woman is his wife, though she passes as a widow with another name. She is wealthy. She has become so at the expense of your flock, perhaps your church, and to the ruin of this wretched man. Remarkably endowed as he is with talent—Italian talent—a rare subtlety and some eloquence, he is literally the mere creature and slave of this woman. He has fled. The fellow, Andres, there, assisted his flight. The woman will follow him with all her children. Look to see the house vacant in two weeks."

"Pity, knowing these things, that you had not insisted upon his being surrendered to the civil authorities. We can—we will—degrade him; make him

perpetually loathsome and odious among our people; but such a soul, so corrupt, will hardly suffer, as he ought, from a spiritual sentence."

"Perhaps not, and yet—"

Frederick looked to Marie. She smiled to him gratefully. Base criminal as Paul Roquetti had proved himself, at last, after a sixty years' reputation of sanctity, Marie could only remember him as the honored Christian teacher of her infant and youthful nature.

The Archbishop did his duty. Father Paul Roquetti was degraded—a sentence more heavy and terrible, in a spiritual sense, than that of excommunication even, was passed upon him. He was blotted from the pages of the Christian church. As Frederick had predicted, Louise Porterier disappeared, with all her family, in two weeks after. No traces exist of any of these parties, at least under these names. What remains? Three days after the eventful discovery, which concluded the claims of the ghost, Frederick had an interview with Marie de Berniere.

"Frederick," she said, "look at this. If you are now willing to marry me, I am yours."

She threw off the cap she had worn, and let her long hair free. It fell voluminous and soft upon her shoulders. But it was mottled with gray!

"See the agonies of one little month in this writing of the grave!"

This was all she said; he opened his arms, and she buried her face, sobbing audibly, in his bosom. Need I say that they became one. With tearful eyes, and

broken accents, the excellent Archbishop himself united them in the most precious and permanent bonds of life. They were happy—lived happily as one;—for what an indulgent manhood was his!—what a devoted dependence, subduing all affectations, formed the secret and the spirit in the love of her fearfully tested affections. Friends! dear friends! Is it possible that I see ye no more around that happy board, which made all happy!

THE MAROON;

A LEGEND OF THE CARIBBEES.

CHAPTER I.

The waters of the Caribbean Sea, subject to some of the wildest vicissitudes that ever sweep the billows of the western hemisphere, were never more placid and lovely to the eye than on the morning of the 26th of August, in the year of grace one thousand five hundred and thirty-two. The exquisite calm of heaven—that delicious serenity and repose of atmosphere which seem never so lovely or so perfect as in those latitudes where the capricious winds may, at any moment, lash themselves and the ocean into immitigable fury, and where nothing is long secure against their violence—appeared to rest, with the bosom of the halcyon, upon the mighty deeps of sea. The sky was without a cloud—the breeze, soft and spicy as if borne fresh, on the very instant, from the aromatic islands of the east, was gentle without languor, and just sufficed to waft along, under easy sail, the high-pooped Spanish bark that might be seen to form, as it were a natural and becoming portion of the vast

and beguiling picture. She alone stood up, careering over the watery waste, relieving its monotonous revels, and looming out, beyond her natural size, in comparison with the uniform smoothness of the waters. A swift and well-built vessel of the time, was the Diana de Burgos, named after a favorite beauty of old Spain. She had taxed all the genius of the architect of that day in her modelling, to do honor to her namesake. And he had succeeded—so perfectly succeeded, that the emulous little bark had already acquired a peculiar reputation, such as that enjoyed by the Baltimore clipper of modern periods, for exquisite grace of air, and unparalleled fleetness of foot. She was the pride of the waters, and cleft them, or passed over them, as if endued with all the consciousness of the young and haughty beauty whose name had not been taken by her in vain. Of her deeds, of her peculiar employment, in the western hemisphere, we shall say nothing. At that wild period, we know very well what was the usual history in the New World, as well upon the ocean as the land. "No peace beyond the line," was the common proverb of license among the rovers of all the European nations; and our Diana de Burgos carried within her graceful girdle all the requisite resources for deeds of strength and violence. Her loveliness of model did not conflict with her capacity for fight; and a single glance upon the swarthy groups that covered her deck, would satisfy any skeptic, without farther search, that she had already enjoyed no inconsiderable experience in the trade of war. Could her polished decks have spoken out,

what revelations of blood and terror might they not have made! But her past history is nothing to us. It is enough that she still possesses sufficient materials of interest for a startling and a touching narrative. At the moment when we ascend her sides—in that calm and lovely day—in that serene and delicious atmosphere—with that broad deep ocean, as smooth as it could well appear, to comport with the necessary degree of animation which, to form a picture, such a prospect seems to require, and, at the same time to disarm every sense of danger in the bosom of the most apprehensive—we shall find that no such calm and serenity prevail among her inmates. We discover them grouped about in small parties along her deck, here leaning against her masts, there crouched among bulk and cordage—variously placed in different attitudes—a hundred sturdy seamen and soldiers, speaking little—an occasional word or sentence only—but all looking as if thoroughly informed and anxious in relation to some matter of evidently increasing interest. The broken sentences to which we listen—the half-uttered inquiry, the faltering suggestion have no meaning for our ears, though clearly of ready comprehension by all around. Happily, a stir takes place among them; they rise to their feet—the group separate; there is a sudden show of restraint, as from the approach of authority. A word has gone forth which leads to expectation, and the eagerness, but partially suppressed, which now, in every visage, follows prompt upon its former simple look of doubt and anxiety, may well encourage us to hope for the grati-

fication of our own curiosity. Patience, the door of the cabin is thrown open!

The group which appears within is one to add somewhat to the interest of expectation. In the foreground appears a person seated in a chair, one of those ancient high-backed fabrics used, about that period, in all European countries which had reached any degree of civilization. This person is a man of countenance more striking than impressive. He is, we may be permitted to say at once, the captain of the Diana —Don Velasquez de Tornel—a personage, short and corpulent, with great hands and limbs, a neck thick and short like that of a bull, and of a face plethoric and fiery red. His features are dark and fierce, and marked by the signs of an angry passion, the appearance of which he seems laboring to suppress. His eyes are small, intense, and catlike of expression, keen, vigilant, and cunning. His nose is short and sharp, his lips thick, and marked, at moments, by a slight quiver, which betrays the secret emotion. A thin, but grizzly beard overspreads his chin and cheeks. He would seem to be a person about fifty years of age —a man of strifes and violence, of quick and irritable temper, and of restless, unforgiving moods. His feet are wrapped in bandages of flannel, and suggest the true reason why he remains seated at a time when his thoughts and passions would seem disposed to goad him into the most eager exercise. Thus seated, he is wheeled out upon the deck by his attendants; while, slowly following him, appears a female, whose highly expressive features and wildly peculiar beauty, make

her less an object of interest than study. Her person is small, but highly formed; commanding, from its ease of carriage, its erectness, the bold defiance in her eye, and the imperious curling of her lip. The style of her beauty is not of the noblest order. It possesses but little of the spiritual, but is of a kind more likely to secure admiration during an age, and in a region, where the passions learn to triumph and command in the absence of the sentiments. She takes her place at a little distance in front of the spot occupied by Velasquez. Her arms folded across her breast, she preserves an erect posture, while her eyes, neither gazing upon, nor averted from him, seem to be filled with a twofold expression of wounded pride and lurking anxiety. His glance surveys her keenly and unreservedly. There is a mixture of tenderness and suspicion in his gaze, while the sinister smile which now curls his lips, gives to his whole countenance the air of a brooding and sleepless malignity. This silent watch is so prolonged as to be painful; but her features never swerve; nor does her expression alter. She looks as she did when she took her first position. There is evidently a motive for this inflexibility, which she maintains without faltering, so long as his eye is upon her. But when he turns away and summons the pilot to his side, then it is seen that her breast heaves as if to throw off the oppressive burden of self-constraint—then it is that her cheek pales and lip quivers, and all her countenance betrays a fear which it has hitherto been its business to suppress.

But a few words are spoken by the captain to his pilot; a question is asked—a command is given; and while the latter is retiring, he is reminded—to "see that all things are in readiness, and to keep a bright look-out." The pilot withdrawn, the eyes of Velasquez once more, but slowly, address themselves to the lady. But she has recovered from the momentary emotion which oppressed her. Her features are once more inflexible; her look is steady; she has nerved herself to a resolute endurance of his gaze; and the muscles of her face, like the strings of her soul, are rendered tenacious by a will which his would vainly endeavor to overcome. Failing in this sort of examination, he addressed her—seemingly resuming a dialogue which the previous scene had interrupted.

"You have answered clearly, Maria! It is well for us both that you did so. It would have been a grief to me that I should visit your head with my wrath, even though it should be shown—Madre de Dios!—that you had merited it by such a crime as this. For, did I not pluck you from the accursed gypsy—have I not made you a lady, and bestowed my love upon you? It were a crime against God, if you had been false to me!"

"I have answered you, Don Velasquez!"

"So you have, my beauty—so you have! But it is not enough to answer. Must one look angry because one is virtuous—eh?"

"But to be wrongfully accused—to be wrongfully threatened!—"

"Oh! oh! one gets used to such things, if all

other things go right. Of course, I know that you are innocent. But how did I know it then? For you will admit, my life, that the affair looked very suspicious. There was I, groaning in my agony with this accursed pain, and where were you? Ah! well! you were not with this whelp of a musician? You did not sit looking up into his face, while he was stretching his throat against the wind, and singing nonsense to his silly guitar? You did not prefer listening to him to tending on me, and, of course, Juan must have been mistaken in supposing that you suffered him—that you were willing that he should—ah! never mind! It is not easy to speak of such things without choking—but when this whelp of a musician did put his arms about you, it was only his impertinence, and you properly repulsed him—"

"Has not Antonio already assured you of this?" demanded the lady, coldly.

"True—true!—"

"And Perez?"

"Very true—and Juan, I say, must have been mistaken."

"He is a wretch!——"

"Nay, nay, do not abuse the child—my own sister's child—has good eyes, too; but, nevertheless, did not see—was mistaken—saw this Lopez presume—this guitar-player—but did not see, as Antonio and Perez did, that you resented this presumption—that you frowned and threatened! But what an atrocious impertinence, that such a poor, puny, beardless beast of a boy should thus behave himself. Is it not mon-

strous? But he shall sweat for it! should he not? Can such an outrage be excused? What think you, my life—should not this wretch of a musician suffer? —Say? answer me!"

The lady replied by a vacant stare.

"Ah! I see! You feel the enormity of his offence. You have not words sufficient to declare it. Well! you will be better able to acknowledge the propriety of the punishment I will inflict upon him."

These words were accompanied by a hideous grin. The tyrant readily conceived all the torture which he inflicted. He watched eagerly the features of the person he addressed, anxious to extort from them some acknowledgment of the heart's inward suffering; and seemed chagrined to perceive the steadiness of aspect with which the woman bore his scrutiny.

"Truly, my life," he continued, with less than usual of that catlike play of feature which declared his peculiar malice, "truly, my life, it pleases me to perceive that you have no sympathies for this monster of a musician. I did fear, I confess, I did fear—that, though you might not have erred with him, you might have been foolish enough, through some misplaced sentiment of feminine tenderness, to have interposed and pleaded against his punishment. That would have been a weakness, my beautiful Gitano. We must punish such enormous guilt. We must punish it as it deserves! We must so punish such an offender as that he shall never so offend again!"

He paused—and gazed steadily upon the woman! But she too well knew the cool malignity of the tyrant

—his peculiar and unrelenting nature—to suffer herself to be deceived by the obvious lure which he threw out that she should implore mercy for the criminal of whom he spoke. She also felt the importance of maintaining the same settled indifference and coldness of aspect as before. He allowed some lengthened moments to intervene, and resumed, but with evident disappointment—

"And you have nothing to say, my life?"

"Nothing!"

"Madre de Dios? But it is so precious to me, that you so thoroughly acknowledge my justice. Ho! there—Juan!—bring forth this vile singer, this wretch of a guitar-player—this audacious musician! He shall vex no longer with his midnight strummings, the sweet quiet of our lady of Burgos—our chaste Diana—whom he makes unhappy by his presumption. See to it Juan! bring him forth quickly!"

CHAPTER II.

THERE might have been seen, for a single moment, while the eye of Don Velasquez was averted, a convulsive quiver upon the lips of the woman. Her arms somewhat sank in that moment, and were clasped together with a spasmodic intensity; yet the action was too gently performed—the movement quite too slight—to fix the regards of the person whose glance she chiefly feared. In that brief moment—in those

slightly expressed emotions—it could be seen that she felt her worst struggle was at hand. But it could be seen, also, that she was possessed of wondrous faculties for endurance. In what school she had acquired this capacity, it needs not that we should ask—it is enough that passion, too, has its power of self-restraint, as well as virtue—and is never so intense, perhaps, as when it is subjected, by its own will, to the check of denial and delay. In the heart of the woman, this power of self-restraint, once acquired, is perhaps far more complete than in the heart of the man—if for no other reason than that of her habitual subjection to the will of a superior, and the habitual exercise of a policy in society which is not necessary to him by whom society is controlled or commanded.

The individual named Juan now made his appearance. He was what is called, ordinarily, a handsome youth; with smooth features, long, oily, and somewhat curling locks, which evidently demanded much of his attention—and a person which, though very slightly, was yet very symmetrically made. But the intelligence of his countenance was that of cunning rather than of thought; and in his small gray eyes, there might be seen a something of the malignant and catlike expression which made so conspicuous a feature in those of his uncle. He was showily habited, with a gay cloak of silk, falling gracefully from his shoulders, in addition to the ordinary doublet, which he also wore, of a rich description of cloth, with slashed sleeves, and a great ruff at either wrist. A heavy gold chain about his neck, with a shining *agnus dei*,

ostentatiously displayed, rather discovered his love of ornament than any very decided religious feeling in his breast. But without detailing the several parts of his costume, it will suffice to say that he was a sort of a sea-dandy, thought well of his person, and, for reasons of his own, was disposed to make the most of it. His manner was full of consequence and confidence, and, as he approached his uncle, it might be seen that he possessed no small share of influence in determining the character of the latter's counsels. He drew nigh to him, and whispered a few moments in his ear.

"Be it so, my son! be it so!" said the other kindly, and with a sudden brightening of the features. Had the eye of Don Velasquez, at that moment, been directed suddenly to the features of the lady, he would have been somewhat gratified, as well as informed, by their frequent and excessive changes. On the appearance of the youth, Juan, she had addressed to him a single glance of equal bitterness and scorn; and, while he stooped and whispered in the ears of his uncle, her look was that of a loathing such as one would naturally feel at contact, suddenly, with a reptile equally hideous and dangerous. But her features, under the control of a most watchful will, resumed their look of icy indifference before her tyrant could detect their changes.

The whispered dialogue with Juan over, the latter drew nigh to the lady, and proceeded to whisper in her ear also. She recoiled from him with unqualified disgust.

"Beware!" he exclaimed, but in subdued accents, Beware, Maria; you are on the eve of the precipice, and a single word may incur for you the fate of your favorite."

"Assure me of that and I welcome it," she answered, with a sudden resumption of all the vivacity which could be made to gather in an eye of unexampled brilliancy and beauty.

The youth smiled spitefully, but said, "You are wild! That fate would realize no hopes for either of you. It would be death, and something worse than death—denial to the grave, and, of course, beyond it. But I am not now speaking of your death. It is through me, Maria, that you live. Nay, you live—need I tell you that?—because I love!"

"What if I proclaim you, where you stand, the villain that you are?" answered the lady, in accents similarly subdued with his own.

"It would avail you nothing! He would regard it only as a mode of escape, which, in your desperation, you seek to adopt. Does it need still that I should prove to you how completely I control his ear and fashion his will."

"Alas, no! But what is the purpose, as he understands it, of this whispered conference with me!"

"Ah! that is *my* secret," the other answered with a smile—"enough, that I speak of anything but that! My true purpose is with you, and for you, and myself! I will save this favorite of yours—save him unharmed aboard the vessel, with probably no greater penalty than close imprisonment, and"—he

spoke this with a grin—"perhaps a denial of his guitar. I will do this, Maria, if you will become wise as I would have you—if—"

"I understand you—but that is impossible! I tell you, Juan de Silva, I loathe you too much to keep terms with you. You have gone too far—you have shown me too vile an aspect—too serpent-like a tooth, for me to suffer your near approach, save as a most hateful and hated enemy. I will brave any fate before I suffer this!"

"Beware! your words but doom your favorite."

"Be it so! Had he been the man I thought him, it had never come to this. It had been your fate, not his, or mine! He deserves all that he finds, failing himself, and failing me, at the proper moment. Hark you, the dagger which his fingers clutched, when your felon hand rested upon his shoulder, was put into them by mine; and the name which my lips uttered when I gave it him, was that of Juan de Silva. And yet he struck not, but tamely submitted, sacrificing himself and me. Now, that you have heard all, judge for yourself what terms there can be between us!"

The lofty, if not noble scorn which filled her features at this narrative, heightened wondrously the beauty of her countenance. Her companion, though evidently moved by her words, could not forbear betraying, with open admiration of his gaze, how much it stimulated his passion. He spoke, after a brief moment, lost in the absorbing pleasure of his gaze.

"I can forgive you, Maria, and adore you still. That this Lopez was thus base and insensible, should

surely satisfy you that he was not meant to enjoy, or to deserve, a heart like yours. Be mine, and all is yours! I am here the master. I can save this creature—will save him, for I fear him not, but—I must have your assurance."

"Never! Juan de Silva! Never!"

"Beware!"

"Never!"

"Once again, beware! You precipitate his fate!"

"I should precipitate myself upon a worse, if I sought to save him upon these conditions. I loathe and hate you, Juan de Silva; too much to endure your smiles, your favors, the snake-like and revolting coil of your venomous embrace."

"You have doomed him!" was the sullen answer from the scarcely parted lips of the youth. "His fate is sealed forever!"

He was about to turn away.

"Stay!" was the eager whisper of the woman.

"Well."

"What is that fate?" was the faintly spoken inquiry that reached his ears.

"You will know soon enough. His hour approaches."

"And I too am prepared for mine! I too can perish!" were the muttered accents which reached the retreating ears of the scowling Juan. He turned, and fixed a simple glance upon her pallid but proud features. The glance was one of equal hate and mockery. It helped to strengthen her, and her high spirit prepared itself for the worst.

CHAPTER III.

"I WAS right, sir," said Juan aloud, as he returned to the seat of his uncle, who had been watching with some curiosity the progress of this conference, of which he heard not, of course, a single syllable. "She is prudent and sensible. She will not interpose with prayer or argument to balk the ends of justice. She will not meddle with his fate."

There was something like disappointment in the dark, malignant features of Velasquez.

"Yet did she seem exceedingly slow in coming to her resolution?"

"By no means, sir. She was prompt enough; but" —here the sentence was concluded in a whisper that reached only the ears of Velasquez—"but it was my policy to persuade her, if possible, that her entreaties might avert his fate. Could I have succeeded, it might have served to confirm and strengthen our suspicions. But she is firm—she may be guiltless! But of the guilt of Lopez there can be no doubt. She denies not that."

Juan had his own motives for this statement. He did not despair, yet, of finally overcoming the resolution of the woman. His passion, in this, somewhat baffled his judgment. But of this hereafter.

"Well, there is nothing left but to punish the one. Bring him forth."

Juan retired—the anxious soul of the lady followed

his parting footsteps, but her eyes maintained a steady and unfaltering gaze, as before, neither resting upon nor absolutely shrinking from the countenance of Velasquez. The pilot was again summoned to the side of the latter.

"Well?" was the brief but intelligible inquiry. It was sufficiently understood.

"We approach, Señor."

"Good! see to your ship."

The pilot disappeared—a bustle announced new parties to the scene, and, preceded by Juan, a youth came forward under the conduct of two soldiers. He was manacled hand and foot, and moved with difficulty. The rattling of the chains was heard. It smote upon the soul of the woman, but she turned not once her head. The eyes of Velasquez were upon her. A savage grin lighted up his dark, satanic countenance, and left no doubt in the minds of those who beheld that he meditated a purpose of the deadliest malice. The youth in bonds was of graceful person and handsome features, but they were not those of a man of character or courage. The cheeks were of a deadly paleness—the lips quivered with apprehension—the whole air and expression were those of one totally unequal to the trial that lay before him. His eye wandered restlessly and apprehensively to the countenance of one or the other of the three parties to whom the reader has been introduced, without daring to encounter the gaze of either. Velasquez watched his movements with the exultation of a cat in possession of her prey. The face of Juan bore a similar expres-

sion; while in the fine masculine spirit which made itself conspicuous in the face of the woman, in spite of all her efforts to subdue it, there might be seen a strange conflict between tenderness and scorn.

"Unbind him!" said Velasquez.

"Oh, thanks! thanks!" muttered the victim, looking appealingly to his tyrant. The scorn deepened in its shadows upon the face of the woman.

"You know not yet for what you have to be thankful," was the sneer of Juan, as he busied himself in undoing the manacles.

"Speak to me, Juan. For what am I reserved? what may this mean if it be not mercy?"

"It means freedom," was the response, still in a whisper.

"Well—and that —"

"*May* be mercy," was the ironical return of Juan, as he withdrew from between Velasquez and his prey. The latter now looked with features in which hope and doubt were still at a lively struggle, upon the face of his tyrant. He made a step toward him. The uplifted hand of Velasquez arrested his approach.

"Lopez de Levya, were I to have thee drawn up by the neck to yon spar, as the heretic English do those whom they would destroy, it were no more than thou deservest. But I am of a more merciful temper —I have taken the chains from thy limbs."

A lively gratitude overspread the features of the person addressed; but he still trembled with a natural anxiety and doubt. He knew his tyrant.

"I mean to set thee free!"

"Thanks! thanks!"

"Nay, I will do more for thee than this. I will elevate thee to rare dignities. I will make thee a chief, a prince, a sovereign of land and sea. Thou shalt be able to stand up in thine empire, and none will say thee nay."

A pause. The culprit looked wildly at this language. It was something more than apprehension that shone in his face. There was no mistaking the hideous malice of the speaker; there was no doubting the ironical grin upon the lips of Juan; and the experience of the ship had seldom found mercy or forgiveness or generosity in either. The eye of the woman was now fixed fully upon that of Velasquez, her intense interest in what she had to hear making her somewhat relax in the stubborn vigilance of thought which had impressed itself upon all her features. Velasquez resumed:—

"The quiet of this part of the Caribbean Sea, as thou well knowest, is seldom broken by the prows of Europeans. The savage steers his bark in other courses, dreading its wild currents and fearful whirlpools. Here, he who shall make his abode will be a sovereign beyond dispute. It may be ages before he will see upon his horizon, driven by hostile tempests, the white sails of a Christian vessel. No empire could be more secure from challenge—no state more certainly beyond the danger of overthrow."

Another pause, and a conviction of what was intended at once passed into the soul of the woman. Her hands were griped convulsively together, and the

paleness of her cheek increased. The culprit, to whom Velasquez addressed himself, simply appeared bewildered. Chains, confinement, terror, and probably want of food and sleep, had rendered his faculties obtuse. But Velasquez proceeded rapidly to his complete enlightenment.

"Look out upon the sea, good Lopez," and his hand waved in the direction of the object to which the ship had been sensibly approaching. At a league's distance a little island was distinctly perceptible, though seeming to be scarcely upheaved above the billows which encircled it. Trees in groups might be seen to wave upon it, the earth rose into moderate hills and elevations as the eye penetrated the interior. Numerous wild-fowl sailed in swift gyrations above it, and gigantic birds strode majestically along its white and sandy shores.

"That island, Lopez de Levya, I discovered for the first time when I last traversed this ocean. I made the discovery against my own will, being driven hither by stress of weather. I little dreamed at that time of its future usefulness; but when our weather-beaten pilot, old Gomez, in beholding its solitude, declared that it would be the spot, of all the world, in which love would be most likely to find security, we called it, in a merry jest, 'The Isle of Lovers,' and when I remembered that it was farther said, 'One might be a sovereign here without paying his tenth to any crown,' then did I conceive how fitly I might reward merit, by bestowing this island upon the deserving—

upon one who would desire security for his love and a sovereignty beyond dispute."

The eyes of the culprit were gradually enlarging. He had slowly begun to guess the terrible destiny which was before him, and the first feeling of overwhelming apprehension necessarily kept him dumb. He looked at his tyrant with eyes full of vacant terror. The latter gave him but few moments for meditation or doubt, as he thus proceeded :—

"Thou hast done me great wrong, Lopez de Levya. Thou hast audaciously presumed upon the lady of my love. For this wrong will I reward thee! We are commanded, as thou knowest, my son, to forgive those who do us injury. I will go farther than the commandment. I will honor thee with wealth and territory, and the highest distinction. Henceforth shalt thou be a prince, an absolute sovereign, Lopez de Levya, and as thy suitable empire behold the 'Isle of Lovers,' which I now bestow upon thee. There shalt thou make music to the night, with no constraint. None shalt say nay to thy strumming. If thou shalt please no damsel's ears with thy song, thou shalt at least offend in nothing the rights of others. Thou shalt sing thy areytos to the stars, and find them more gentle in thy sight than such eyes as thou hast but too frequently offended with thy wilful fondness. Am I not right in this, lady mine?" and with a smirk quite as full of sarcasm as of tenderness, the persecutor of both parties turned his gaze from the face of the wretched man to that of the scarcely less wretched woman. But he gained nothing

by the scrutiny. Her glance was fixed and obdurate, and conveyed no meaning in it, such as that which his jealous suspicions might have looked to see. He watched her features for a few moments with a dissatisfied expression, then resuming his former tones and aspect, he addressed himself to his nephew, Juan.

"Juan, my son, we trust we have sufficiently said to make this excellent prince understand what honors are designed him in requital for his evil deeds. It is for thee to do the rest. Take the prince, therefore, conduct him to the boat, and do thou see him safely placed within the limits of his empire. Give him provision for a month, in which space of time doubtless he will be able to bring his subjects to proper subjection and take his tithes of the produce of the land. Give him a crossbow and a spear, that he may coerce them should they rebel or fly, and see that you forget not to hang his guitar about his neck, that he may regale his hours of recreation and repose with the precious ditties he so much loves to sing in other ears. So shall he have pleasing recollections of one, at least, for whom he will scarcely ever touch guitar again."

CHAPTER IV.

THE doom was pronounced; the hand of the executioner—the hand of his most bitter enemy, Juan de Silva—was laid upon the shoulder of the victim; but he refused to yield his faith to his own fears. He

still hoped against conviction—still shrunk from a belief in that punishment which, to the timid and dependent nature, such as his, seemed to involve terrors much more extreme than any threatened form of death. But when he at last yielded to the conviction which had long been entertained by all around—unless, perhaps, by the woman, his supposed associate in crime—then the whole strength of his soul, feeble in its best moments, seemed to give way on the instant. Every show of manhood was forgotten. There was no pride to keep up appearances; no struggle to maintain a decent show of fortitude and firmness; but the miserable culprit sank down into the most lamentable imbecility, to the shame of all around him.

"Mercy! mercy! For the sake of the Blessed Virgin, have mercy upon me, Don Velasquez," he shrieked rather than pleaded, when the determined aspects of the men appointed to convey him to the boat, and the violent grasp of Juan upon his shoulder, silenced all doubts as to the real intentions of his tyrant to carry out his sentence, in full, as it had been delivered. The hard-souled sailors, as much in scorn as in pity, recoiled from the piercing feminine entreaty of the victim, and left him free for the moment, as if in doubt whether Velasquez might not yield to the supplications which were urged with such a humiliating disregard to manhood. Falling upon his knees, he crawled toward the spot where sat the arbiter of his fate, glowing in the enjoyment of that bitter-sweet morsel of revenge which is so grateful to the malignant nature. In his eyes—had those of the victim not

been blinded by his own tears—had he not been too base to venture to accompany his entreaties by a resolute look upon the face of him upon whose word his fate rested—he might have seen how hopeless were all his pleadings. But he saw nothing—as he crawled along the deck to the feet of the tyrant—but the terrible danger which he was anxious to escape. Could he have seen the inexpressible scorn which dilated the nostrils and curled the lips of the woman—could he have heard her bitter and only half-suppressed accents of loathing—muttered between her gnashing teeth! But they could not have changed his nature!

"Can he not die! Can he not die! Anything but this! And yet," she continued—herself unconscious that she spoke—"yet how should it be that one who had not the soul to slay his enemy, in the moment when all that made life precious lay in the blow—how should it be that he should aim the weapon at his own bloodless heart, though to escape this most loathsome tyranny."

"Beware!" was the single word whispered close beside her ear, from the lips of Juan de Silva. "Beware! lest a worst fate befall thee even than his! Wouldst thou peril life for such a reptile!"

She was silent at the suggestion. Not that she had any fears of death; but, just then, her quick thought and resolute spirit suddenly conceived its own method for escape and vengeance. Other emotions than those of scorn filled her bosom, as the whisper of Juan, like the hissing of a hateful serpent, filled her ears; and in their sudden consciousness, she

trembled lest her feeling should declare itself aloud, in spite of the resolute will which she invoked to curb and keep it in. The emotion which her lips did not declare, was conspicuous for the instant on her countenance, and remained unseen only in consequence of the absorbing nature of the event in progress at the feet of Velasquez. To this spot the abject culprit had continued to crawl, unrestrained by the stern command of his tyrant not to approach him. To his knees he clung, though the latter strove to shake him off, and to spurn him away with the members which were too heavily swathed and bandaged to suffer him to use them with any efficiency for such a purpose. His pleadings, which were of a sort to move loathing rather than pity, produced no feeling of either kind in the breast of Velasquez. They provoked his merriment rather. He grinned as he beheld the writhings of the wretched creature before him. He had a sorry jest for all his contortions. Verily, the Spanish adventurers of that day in America, were a terrible banditti! Of these, Velasquez was a proper specimen. When his victim appealed to him for the sake of his widowed mother at Segovia, he answered—

"I shall tell her of thy possessions, Lopez; she shall hear of thy elevation. She was always a woman of rare ambition. Did I not know her in her younger days? Knowest thou not that she once disposed her mantilla so that she might make a captive of me? Had she done so, verily, it might have been mine own son, for whom this Isle of Lovers hath been found. I shall tell her of thy fortune, Lopez. She shall re-

joice in thy principality; and it may be, will find her way out to thee, seeking to share in the wealth of thy dominions. Enough now—take him hence, I tell thee; —Juan, son, wilt thou not see the prince bestowed upon his empire! I begin to weary of this gratitude."

Again the officers approached, and again they hesitated—all but Juan—as the cries of the wretched imbecile rang through the vessel. The sailors would still have suffered him to urge his prayers for mercy; but Juan had no such yielding nature, and he knew, better than they, how profitless were all entreaties. *He* had resolved, for his own purpose, that there should be no relentings in the brutal spirit of Velasquez. He left the side of Maria de Pacheco, at the summons of his uncle, and with his own hand, grappled the victim, while giving the word to the sailors chosen to assist him. But, rising to his feet, Lopez dashed away from the grasp of his assailant, and once more rushed in supplication to Velasquez. His terrors gave him wonderful strength, and a faculty of speech scarcely less wonderful. He was positively eloquent. Never was prayer for mercy more passionate or more pregnant with the best argument in behalf of mercy. They touched all hearts but the two alone which it had been of any avail to move. These were immovable. Again were his entreaties answered by scurrile jest, mocking suggestion, and derisive laughter. The taste for the sports of the tauridor who tortures the bull to madness before he bestows the *coup de grace*, could alone afford any likeness to the sort of pleasure which this sea-despot enjoyed in the

fruitless agonies of his victim. It was in a sort of defiance, produced by very shame and despair, that the culprit rose at length to his feet, and, folding his arms upon his breast, submitted to his fate, from which it was evident that no degree of humiliation could possibly suffice to save him. A smile softened the features of Maria de Pacheco.

"It is well!" she murmured to herself. "A little sooner and the shame would have been spared to both!"

The victim seemed to hear her accents, though not to understand them. He turned a timid glance toward her, but her eye no longer sought his own. She was conscious that other eyes were then keenly fixed on both.

The boat was declared to be in readiness. The month's store of provisions, accorded by Velasquez, were thrown into her;—the spear and the crossbow followed; and the hands of the seamen, appointed to convey "the Maroon," were fastened firmly on his shoulder. He was now subdued to submission, if not reconciled to his fate. He no longer opposed himself to their efforts, and though he still spoke the language of entreaty, it was no longer addressed to his tyrant.

"Oh! my countrymen—Antonio, Pedro, it is you who do me thus; it is you, my countrymen, who help to give me up to such a dreadful doom!"

Such was the touching appeal, made to ancient comrades, which the poor wretch uttered at the parting moment. They looked downward in silence, but did not relax their hold upon him.

"And I am to perish on that desolate island;

and the people of my own land leave me to this solitude! They hear the voice of my prayer, and shut their ears against it! I am never more to hear human speech—never more to look upon Christian face—nor call any man brother or friend. Oh! Spaniards, brothers, friends, countrymen!—will you doom me thus—will you desert me thus to the solitude of the sea, which is worset han any death? Christians! help me—speak for me—save me!"

There was a moisture in the eyes of the weather-beaten seamen who stood around him. At this moment the woman advanced suddenly and stood before Velasquez. Juan beheld her purpose in her countenance, and whispered as she passed him, "Beware!" She heard, but did not heed the warning.

"Velasquez!"—she spoke with firmness—"surely, you have carried this jest far enough. You cannot mean really to devote this wretched man to this place of desolation?"

"Jest!" exclaimed the other; "jest, call you it? By my faith, but you have very merrily described a very serious ceremonial. Yet, if there be a jest designed at all, I see that it hath been omitted. Ho, Juan, bring forth the guitar of our prince. See you that it be slung about the neck of Don Lopez. It hath a band of crimson—truly the fitting collar for a sovereign. It will help him to remember his old songs when in the enjoyment of his new seigniory. He shall have his ditty and jest together. It were cruel, lady mine, to deprive him of that which hath been so much his nightly solace! Eh! what sayest thou?"

The person addressed recoiled as if from the tongue of the viper. She was silent, unless the thought which moved her lips, but did not escape in words, might be construed into speech.

"At all events—it is *but* death—*but* death, after all! He hath weapons, and the sea rolls at his feet. He hath but to will, and his exile ends in a moment!"

We shorten a scene which was only too painfully protracted. The victim was hurried to the boat. His feet pressed the lonely islet of which he was mockingly declared the prince. He stood erect, but not in the consciousness of sway. His eyes were fixed upon the vessel from which he was torn, and in which he saw nothing but the country, the friends, the familiar faces from which he was forever sundered. He was unconscious of the mocking performance, when Juan de Silva hung the guitar about his neck. The awkward appendage was no burden to him at such a moment. The faces of those who had placed him upon the sands were turned away. The sound of their parting voices had died away upon his ears. The boat was pushed from the shore—yet he still stood, with a stare of vacant misery in his aspect, upon the spot where they had placed him. Long after the prow of the boat had been turned for the ship, he could be seen in the same place, with the ludicrous decoration upon his breast, while, with still uplifted hands, he seemed to implore the sympathy of his comrades and the mercy of his tyrant. But of neither was he vouchsafed any proofs. Mercy was none—sympathy was powerless

to save. Even she! But of her he dared not think! She had been his fate; and though, in his soul, he dared not blame her, yet when she rose to recollection, it was always to provoke a sentiment of bitterness which a nobler spirit never could have felt. He saw the boat rejoin the vessel. He saw once more her broad sails spread forth to catch the breeze. Gradually they lessened beneath his gaze. The world which held his soul and his hope, grew smaller and smaller, contracting to a speck, which, at length, faded utterly away in the deepening haze which girdled the horizon. Then when his eyes failed any longer to delude him with a hope, did he fall prostrate upon the sands, in a swooning condition, which, for the time, wholly and happily obliterated the terrible sense of his desolation.

CHAPTER V.

It will not be difficult with many persons, to comprehend how a condition of utter solitude should not necessarily produce a sense of pain. To the man of great mental resources, and of a habit contemplative and thoughtful, such a condition would be apt rather to suggest ideas of complete security and repose, which would be friendly to the enjoyment of a favorite indulgence. To spirits whom the world has soured—whom the greedy strifes of men have offended—men of nice sensibilities and jealous affections, whose friendships have proved false and wounded—as so many

deceitful reeds which have broken and pierced their sides; to the heart of deep and earnest passions, robbed of those upon whom all the heart's affections have been set; these, all, might rejoice in an abode from which the trying services, and vexing necessities, and disquieting obtrusions, of social life, were shut out and excluded forever. But Lopez de Levya was not one of these! He was young, and handsome, and hopeful, and this was his first trouble. The world still loomed out before his vision, the gay and songful paradise which youthful fancies describe it still. There were warm passions and eager sympathies in his soul still to be gratified; and though we may not regard him as a person to whom affections of any kind were very necessary, yet had he a bosom filled with those which grow from an intense appetite for praise—which could have their gratification only in a world of beings like himself. It would be impossible to describe the utter desolation which possessed the bosom of the unhappy wretch when he did finally awaken to realize the fact that he was left alone—utterly abandoned by his comrades—upon an obscure islet of the Caribbean Sea! It was a long time, indeed, before he could utterly conceive his own situation—a long time before he could persuade himself that the stubborn and unrelenting spirit of Velasquez had absolutely resolved that such should be his doom. For hours—until the midnight came with its sad and drooping stars, looking down mournfully upon the billows of the ever-chiding ocean—until the daylight dawned, and the red sun, rushing up from the eastern waters, rose angry and

fiery, and blazing down upon the little islet with the fiery glance of a destroying despot;—for the first dreary interval, from sun to sun—he still cherished the hope that this was but a trial of his strength—a cruel experiment upon his youth and courage;—and, recovering from the first feelings of consternation, when, at sunset, the dusky white sails of the vessel finally disappeared from sight, the unhappy wretch still flattered himself that, with the morning, he should hail her outline once more upon his horizon, and catch the glitter of her foaming prow coming to his rescue. And with this hope he clung to the beach all night. He slept not—how could he sleep? Even for one night, how intense was the desolation of that scene. There was the eternal sighing and moaning of the sea, which, toward the morning, subsided into calm and slept on, as if still dreaming of future tempests. And there were voices all around him of strange animals and wild-fowl—sometimes a chirp, as of an insect, and sometimes the scream of some passionate bird;—and, anon, a great plunge in the waters, as if of some mighty beast leaving its place of sleep upon the land. It was among the misfortunes of Lopez de Levya that he was no hero, and all these sounds inspired him with terror. Not less terrible to him were those wild, deep mysterious eyes of the stars, slowly passing over him, and looking down, as if to see whether he slept, in their passage to the deep. Never was night and situation so full of charm, yet so full of the awful and the terrible. Beautiful, indeed, surpassingly beautiful and sweet, was the strange wild charm of that highly

spiritual mingling of land and ocean;—that small and lovely islet, just rising above the deep, so thoroughly environed by its rocking billows, shone upon by that wilderness of stars; breathed over by that pure zephyr, gilding it with perfume and blessing from the South; and haunted by unknown sounds, from strange creatures of the sea and sky, who, in a life of perpetual freedom, could never know the feeling of desolation or of exile.

But the wild romance and the wondrous beauty of the scene were lost upon the man who had no higher idea of the possession of the intellectual nature than such as could be drawn from association with his fellow. The region, unoccupied by man, however beautiful in itself, could bring no joy, no peace to the bosom of the exile. Velasquez knew the real nature of his victim. He well knew that Lopez had no sympathy with the mute existences of sea and sky, of earth and air; and of those more exquisite essences, which, in such a situation, the imaginative nature would have joyed to conjure up from the spiritual world, he thought only with terror and reluctance. He did fancy that voices came to him upon the night air;—the voices of men, and in a strange, unusual language;—and he instantly trembled with fears of the cannibal—the anthropophagi, who were supposed, at that period, to be the only inhabitants of these regions.

But the night passed over in security. He opened his eyes upon another day, in the solitude of that wild abode, ere yet the sun had warmed with his gay tints the gray mansions of the East. He opened his

eyes upon the sea and sky as before. The billows were rolling slowly away at his feet, in long low courses, but slightly lifted by the breezes of the dawn. Vainly were his eyes stretched out over the watery waste, in the pathway of the departed vessel. The vast plain of ocean spread away before him unbroken by a speck; and when the sun rushed up visibly into the heavens, and laid bare the whole bright circumference of the deep, for many a league, undarkened by an object, then the conviction of his utter loneliness—his life of future loneliness—forced itself upon the heart of the wretched youth; and flinging himself once more upon the earth, he thrust his fingers into the sands, and cried aloud in the depth of his agony—

"Jesu! it is true!—it is true!—and I am left—left by my people—to perish here alone!"

We spare his lamentations—his entreaties—as if there were still some human being at hand who might afford him relief and consolation—to whom he might appeal for succor and protection. Prayer he had none. The name of the Deity, of the Saviour, and the Virgin, were sometimes upon his lips; but the utterance was habitual, as he had been accustomed to employ them in mere idleness and indifference. Three days passed, in which despair had full possession of his faculties. In this time he lay crouching upon the beach during the day, and gazing vacantly in the direction in which the ship had gone. At night, he retreated to higher ground, filled with apprehensions of great monsters of the sea—of the seas themselves

—lest, rising suddenly, endued with a human or a fiendish will, they might gather round him while he slept, and hurry him off, beyond escape, to their gloomy abysses. A small clump of trees afforded him the semblance of a shelter. Here he lay, from nightfall to dawn, only sleeping in the utter exhaustion of nature, and suffering, at all other times, from every sort of terror. The stars, looking down through the palm-leaves overhead, with their mild, sad aspects, seemed to him so many mocking and malignant angels exulting in his condition. The moaning of the sea, and the murmurs of the nightwind, were all so many voices of terror appointed to deride him in his desolation, and impress his heart with a sense of unknown dangers. The rush of great wings occasionally along the shore, or the rustle of smaller ones in the boughs above him—perhaps of creatures as timid as himself—kept him wakeful with constant apprehensions; and, at moments of the midnight, a terrible bellowing, as of some sea-beast rising to the shore, or leaving it with a plunge that echoed throughout the islet—struck a very palsy to his heart, that, for the time, seemed to silence all its vibrations. Let us leave the miserable outcast, thus suffering and apprehensive, while we return to the inmates of the vessel by which he was abandoned.

CHAPTER VI.

He was not wholly abandoned. Maria de Pacheco, the woman, who, like himself, was in some degree a victim also to the will, if not the tyranny, of Don Velasquez, was not the creature tamely to submit to injustice, however she might prudently seem to do so. —We need not ask whether there was any real attachment between herself and the poor creature whom we have seen "marooned." It is probable that the degree of regard which she entertained for him was small. He was not the man to fix the affections, to a very large extent, of a woman of so proud and fearless a soul. The feebleness which he had shown had, probably, lessened the attachment of a heart, which, in the possession of large natural courage of its own, might well despise that of one who had displayed so little. But as little did she love the man of whom she had become the slave—we may add—almost without her own consciousness, and at the will of another, by whom she had been sold at a very early age. She was still comparatively young; but with advanced intellect, and an experience that left it no longer immature. Born under the burning sky of Andalusia, tutored in the camp of the Gitano, though not of Zingaro race, she had soon acquired an intensity of mood which was only surpassed by her capacity of subduing it to quiet, under a rigid and controlling will.—Loathing the sway of her tyrant, revolting at

his person, she was as little disposed to regard with favor the affections which had been proffered her, of his more subtle and malignant nephew. The person of Juan de Silva, graceful and showy as it was, could not blind her to his heartless vanities, and that dangerous cunning of character, which so admirably co-operated with the mocking and fiendish coldness of his soul. If she loathed Velasquez, she feared, as well as loathed, De Silva; and feared him the more, as, in possession of the secret of his infidelity to his uncle, she was yet made fully conscious of the truth of his boast, that any revelation of it, which she might make to the latter, would avail but little against him. But, though anxious, she was not the woman to despair! She revolted too greatly at her own condition of restraint, bondage, and denial, to yield even temporarily to despondency. In the moment that saw her feeble and wretched lover consigned to the lonely islet of the Caribbees, she made a secret resolve to avenge his fate, or to peril her own person upon her vengeance. She clearly had no absorbing passion for the victim. It was evident that she could still maintain a prudent restraint upon her feelings at the moment of their greatest trial;—but the highest and proudest heart needs something for affection—some other one upon which to lean for sympathy—and which, at least, makes a show of responsive interest in its affections. It was thus that she had turned a willing ear to the professed devotion of Lopez de Levya—to his tastes and his gentleness, contrasting as they did with the brutality of all around her, and

making her somewhat indifferent to his feebleness of will and lack of courage. But she had not fancied his imbecility to be so great as the hour of trial had shown it. Though scorning his weakness, she sympathized in his cruel destiny. The respite which had been given him from death, by the capricious tyranny of Velasquez, suggested to her mind a hope of his future extrication. Food had been left with him sufficient for a month. What might not be done, in that space of time, by a subtle thought and a determined spirit? In a moment, Maria de Pacheco had her plans conceived, and her soul nerved to the prosecution of a single purpose. But she had an opponent, not less subtle than herself, in the person of Juan de Silva; and the keen, scrutinizing eye which he fixed upon her, as she turned from the spot upon which Lopez had been left, seemed to denote an indistinct conception of the purpose which had passed that very instant through her soul. But she was not discouraged by his fear.

"Well," said he, in a whisper, "you see how hopeless is the struggle!—What is left for you, but—" and a smile of mixed fondness and significance closed the sentence. The ready expression of the woman's face was made to accord happily with the single word with which she furnished an equally expressive conclusion—

"Death!"

"No, no!" said he. "You will not die; you shall not! You shall live to be far more truly the mistress

of the Dian de Burgos, than she finds you now. Why should we be enemies, Maria ?"

"Beware ! your uncle's eye is upon us !"

He turned away, and this single sentence, as it seemed to denote a disposition to make a secret between them, brought a fresh hope to the soul of the young man. He smiled, and glided to his uncle. Maria smiled also, but it was with a sterner feeling—not a less hopeful one, perhaps, but one in which bitterness was a much more positive ingredient than delight.

"I must baffle *his* vigilance," she muttered to herself. "He only need be feared, and he must be met and vanquished! Ay! but how! How! I must manage this—and I will!"

Her eyes followed his retreating form as she spoke. They noted quickly the jaunty air of self-conceit which marked his movements ; they scorned the showy and quaintly-cut garments which he wore, and the profuse decorations of his neck and breast—and the quick instincts of the woman at once suggested an answer to her doubts.

"How, but through his vanity! He would be loved, as he would be admired and watched. Well! —he shall be loved, loved as he desires ! The task is a hard one enough, truly—but it shall be done ! Juan de Silva, you *shall* be loved! You, at least, shall believe it—you *will* believe it ; and this will suffice !"

In this she expressed a portion of her policy. It will be all that we need to show at present. How she pursued this policy—by what constant, hourly prac-

tices—by what adroit feminine arts—and with what fixedness of purpose—need only be suggested. The details would be too numerous. But she was encouraged to perseverance by success. She had reason to believe that she had succeeded in disarming the jealousies, and in awakening the hopes, of her enemy. They both maintained a judicious regard for the exactions of Velasquez; but there were hours when he slept, or when he suffered, when they might throw aside their caution, and speak together without fear or interruption. It is by no means strange that the most artful should be imposed upon by arts such as he himself employs. But what is so blind as vanity? What creature so easily baited as the self-worshipper, when the food tendered him is that which increases his love of self. To make such a one satisfied with himself, is most surely to gain his confidence in you —to persuade him that he is as much an object of your idolatry as of his own, is to obtain access to the few open avenues which conduct to his affections.

Maria de Pacheco had not been vainly tutored in the arts of the *Gitano*. Beautiful in person, graceful in carriage, skilled equally in the song, the dance, and the story, she put in exercise all her powers of attraction, to bind more securely the spells which she aimed to put upon the creature whom she yet loathed with most complete aversion. In two weeks after "the marooning" of her timid lover, she had succeeded in possessing Juan de Silva with the notion that the victim ceased to be remembered. So credulous do the

most vigilant and suspicious become, when blinded by an absorbing passion.

The two were alone together on the vessel's deck, as she swept, one gloomy night, along the waste of sea in silence. Don Velasquez had but a little before been conveyed below. He slept! Maria had ministered to him in song and story as was her wont, with Juan beside her. The departure of Velasquez had left them free to resume a conversation which had been begun before. He had been emboldened by the tenor of a previous dialogue. His hand grasped that of the lady. She suffered him to retain it. He carried it to his lips. It was not withdrawn; but, could her features have been seen, through the dim veil of night which covered them, the infatuated youth beside her, blinded by her charms, and beguiled by her arts, would have shrunk with fear from the deep and vindictive loathing which they betrayed, even while she submitted so quietly to his caresses. The secret thought of Juan de Silva was one of delighted vanity. Could that thought but have found its way into speech, it would have congratulated himself upon the admirable address which he himself had shown, in subduing a spirit which he had hitherto found invincible. He did suffer some words to escape him which conveyed to her mind this idea; and she compressed her lips more closely together, with difficulty maintaining the silence, which, if broken at that moment, would have overwhelmed him with her loathing and her scorn.

"You have forgiven me all, Maria?" he whispered tenderly, fully assured of her answer.

"What was there to be forgiven?"

"The fate of Lopez!"

A slight convulsive shiver passed over the form of the woman, and it required a strong effort to keep from withdrawing herself from his embrace, with a show of horror such as one might express in detaching himself from the folds of a serpent. He continued—

"But it was in my devotion that I sought to destroy. It was because you were so loved, that he was so much hated. I was well assured that, for so mean a spirit, you could not long have suffered pain; and now—"

"You were right," she said, interrupting him; "right; but you—what is your spirit, Juan?"

"My spirit?"

"Yes, your spirit! your courage, your pride, your character? Your person is pleasing to the eye—your talents to the mind! You have grace, beauty, and accomplishments, but—"

"But what?"

The vanity of the youth had taken the alarm. He spoke eagerly and with anxiety. She hesitated to reply, the better to increase this anxiety; and he renewed his entreaties for explanation. She at length gave it.

"Shall I always be loved by the subordinate? Shall the person whom I love, be always the creature of another's will?"

"You mistake, my Maria. You should know, by this time, that I can do what I please with my uncle."

"Why, so you may; but in what manner is it done? By treachery—by falsehood—by meanness—by de-

scending to low arts and petty falsehoods. Let the truth but reach the ears of Velasquez, and he will maroon you as quickly as he did Lopez de Levya."

"Perhaps so; but there's no reason that the truth shall reach his ears?"

"That may be; but shall we live always in terror of the truth—always in the base security of a lie. I tell you, Juan de Silva, such is my spirit, that I demand, in the object of my devotion, manliness of soul—the courage of speech without fear—the spirit to act without subterfuge—the will to command for himself, and through himself, and not as the mere creature of another! And, why should you, with your talents for command—why should you be the lackey of your uncle? —that feeble despot, who—but no, no!—what need? You will not, you cannot understand the nature which I feel—the spirit which sways sovereign in my soul!"

"Ay, Maria, but I do feel, I do understand you."

"Impossible, Juan, or you would rather be with me the sole possessor of some desolate isle, such as that given to Lopez de Levya, than—"

"But how, if we be sole here—here, with the lovely Dian de Burgos for our palace, and the seas of the west for our empire?"

She laid her finger upon her wrist—but a single finger—and lowly murmured in his ears—

"This were, indeed, something; but I tell you, Juan de Silva, you are not the man for this. Your uncle!—"

"And if I prove to you that I am, Maria; if I show you that I can fling aside my scruples when it

will serve my purpose to do so; and that no ties which deny me the gratification of my passions, have the power to keep my affections; if in short, I can say to you, Maria de Pacheco, the Dian de Burgos, henceforward, is mine solely, wilt thou share with me the sovereignty?"

"Alas! Juan, I should dread lest old age seize me, ere I ascend my throne!"

"Demonios! but another week shall not pass ere thou hast it all!"

"Were it so!—but—" The pause was full of meaning.

"Wilt thou promise me, Maria!—"

"Will I not?"

"And thou wilt deny me no more, if I show thee that no voice speaks in authority here but mine?"

"Show me that, Juan—make thyself supreme, and thou shalt be as a sovereign over Maria de Pacheco, as thou wilt then be over the Dian de Burgos. But thy uncle?"

"Speak not of him! Enough!—Thinkest thou I love this servitude any more than thou dost? Thinkest thou it better pleases me than thee that I should minister to one, brutal and bedridden, whose feebleness checks our adventure and lessens our spoils?"

"But how wilt thou"—

"Nay, sweet, let not the manner of the thing disturb thee. Better, indeed, that thou shouldst not know. Thou shalt see if I lack manliness. Thou shalt see if I fail when the moment needs. I am no Lopez de Levya—no mere singer, my Maria. Ah!

if I prove not myself worthy of thy spirit—if I show thee not! Thou didst not know me, Maria—thou doubtest still—thou dost not know me yet. Yes, I tell thee, for a love such as thou canst give me, thou shalt see me do such deeds as were terrible as death to other men!"

The unresisting hand of the woman was carried to his lips as he spoke, as if he would affirm thereon the resolution which he had expressed. Yet even as he kissed them, her fingers, moved by the feeling in her soul, could have grappled his throat in mortal struggle. They separated for the night, and the exulting spirit of Maria declared her conscious triumph in secret soliloquy.

"Ay, ay! methinks I have thee. It is sure. I do not mistake the blindness which is in this passion. He will do! He will perform what he doth not yet promise. The son of the sister shall do murder upon the life of the brother that has murdered him. He is mine! The Dian de Burgos shall be mine. Yet, it will need that it be done quickly. The month is nearly gone! Another week!—but one—one week! Well! I must be patient. I must subdue my soul, while I work with other weapons. Juan de Silva, I shall take thee in my own snare, or I have never used the snare of woman!"

CHAPTER VII.

With her whole soul set upon a favorite project, Maria de Pacheco was not a person to slumber or prove afraid. She was not less sure of herself than of others. She knew the general character and temper of the Spaniard. She knew the spirit which prevailed among the crew of the Dian de Burgos. Though young, and a woman, she had been by no means an unobservant spectator of the various events which had taken place on board since she had become an inmate of the vessel. Besides, she was a sagacious student of character, as are all women of any native intelligence. She possessed the faculty, which seems like an instinct, of seeing, as it were, at a single glance, into the moods of those around her. She knew that Velasquez, *her master*, was no longer the master in his own ship. She as well knew that Juan de Silva was not very popular as his successor. One event, which had taken place a few months before, now pressed upon her recollection, and suggested to her a new auxiliary in working out her scheme.

One of the lieutenants, or as he might be called in our time, a mate, was a Biscayan, named Diego Linares. He was a stout and somewhat surly fellow, habitually; and, in the exercise of his common character, had given a rude or insolent reply to Juan de Silva, who had rewarded him for it, very promptly, with a blow upon the mouth. The dagger of the

Biscayan would have answered the indignity, and was drawn for that purpose, when other parties interfered; and Juan, after the first feeling of excitement had passed over, sought in various ways, and by various civilities—which he never made unnecessarily cheap—to atone for the rashness and folly of his act. The interposition of Velasquez, himself, was finally addressed to the conciliation of the parties, since Diego was a man not easily to be dispensed with. His efforts were apparently successful. The anger of the Biscayan was seemingly subdued, but it was in seeming only. The wound still rankled, and might easily be reopened. Maria de Pacheco saw more deeply into the secret feelings of the injured person than either Juan or Velasquez. She better knew the vindictive temper of Biscayan blood, which is perhaps much more tenacious of its resentments than that of almost all other Spaniards, all of whom are vindictive.

With the first inception of her own resolution, she at once conceived that this resentment might serve her purpose hereafter, and had, accordingly, some time before, addressed herself to the task of making a friend of the discontent. She sought him at periods when the eyes of Juan were withdrawn from her. She sought him with an art which none possess in any degree to compare with her who has been tutored in the camp of the Zingali. She knew the habits of the Biscayan, could rejoice his ear with songs and ballads from the native province of Diego; and frequently, even when she sang before Velasquez, she adroitly chose for her themes such as were familiar to the ears

of the former. These still drew him, loitering nigh, to listen as he traversed the deck upon his midnight watch. Gradually, the parties came to speak together, and, by degrees just as insensible as those by which she had brought Juan de Silva to believe in her newly-born affections for himself, she found her way into the confidence of Linares for another purpose. She fomented his hate for Juan; and, at length, when sure of the future purpose of the latter, she kindled the other's fears for the safety of Velasquez. It would have been easy to arouse Linares to such a degree of fury, as to prompt him to rush upon and slay Juan, with the hope, subsequently, of justifying himself before Velasquez; and such was the wish of Diego; —but the more vigilant woman saw how futile such a proceeding would be, knowing how completely Juan was in the possession of his uncle's confidence. Besides, of what use to her, in her desire to rescue Lopez de Levya, that Velasquez should escape the design of his nephew?

"No, no! good Diego," she said to the excited Biscayan; "this were only to destroy thyself. Would Velasquez believe either thy testimony or mine against Juan de Silva? Thou mightest slay the one, but thou wouldst be sure to perish from the fury of the other."

"I know not—the crew!—"

"Soft! I understand thee! It is well that the men love thee. They should! Thou, in truth, dost all the business of the vessel—Velasquez incapable, and Juan de Silva no seaman, and, I trow, but little of a

soldier. Let, then, the treachery advance which thou canst not arrest, save at thy own peril. It may be that Juan will repent—that he will not do the bloody deed which he meditates. All then will be as before, and our secret suspicions may sleep. But it will be enough that we should keep proper watch, and if thou hast friends in the vessel—"

She paused.

"They are all my friends; they care nothing for Velasquez, now that he can do nothing; and they hate the insolence of this Juan!"

"Good!—then there will only need, if thou hast friends, that thou choose from among them, so that two or three of them may be ready with thyself to avenge thy captain should he meet foul play. Be ready, and I will counsel thee, should I see farther tokens of this conspiracy.

The Biscayan was not superior to the inducements which she had adroitly insinuated rather than expressed. He was made to behold, at the same glance, his revenge obtained upon the man who had subjected him to indignity, and the promotion of his selfish fortunes.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARIA had thus secured a second agent, and made a large step toward the attainment of her object. But the days passed, and the nights followed, and still nothing decisive, on the part of Juan, tended

to confirm the assurances which he had made to his wily confederate. She became anxious and apprehensive, particularly as the passion of the youth seemed to be cooling toward her. He was no longer communicative—no longer sought her as frequently as before. His manner was now hesitating, his brow clouded, and his whole appearance that of a man who was brooding over wild suspicions. But Maria was too much an adept to suffer her own anxieties to be perceptible, while she watched his with apprehension. Her doubts put on the appearance of womanly reserve, of dignified pride, of feminine sensibility, solicitous to avoid exposure. But she was equally studious not to forego the exercise of any, the meanest of her attractions. Her dress was carefully studied, and with the happiest effect; and if her brow was clouded, it was with sadness, the sweeter for the shade. She sang too—never with more exquisite freedom, or with more voluptuous sensibility, than when she sat alone, in the darkness of night, upon the deck of the slowly moving vessel. This was the third night after the last interview, which we have described, with Linares. She was suddenly joined by Juan de Silva. She knew of his approach, but started with well-feigned surprise, as his whisper reached her ears.

"Thou hast thought me a laggard, Maria?"

"Nay, I have suffered no disappointment. I had no hopes of thee, Juan!"

He was piqued.

"That was because thou didst not know me. But

I have been busy in my task. It is not because I am irresolute that I am slow. It is because I would be sure. It is not known to thee, perhaps, that Velasquez hath valuable possessions in Spain. These will serve us hereafter, my Maria, when we shall tire of the sea. I have secured the papers which conduct to these. The key of his coffers is at my girdle. And now—but, hark thee—continue thy ballad. It has beguiled his fancies, and he is about to join us to be nearer thee. There! His bell sounds. I will bring him forth, and—dost thou heed me, Maria?"

His hand trembled with an icy chillness, as he laid it upon her wrist. Her own grew chilled with a sympathetic consciousness of what he designed.

"Thy song! Thy ballad!" he muttered convulsively as he left her, and, almost unconscious of what she did, she resumed, in accents that slightly faltered, the ballad of 'Belerma,' one of her favorite songs, which she had probably learned from a purer source than that of the Zingali camp.

"Quando vio aquel corazon
Estando èn el contemplado,
De nuevas gotas de sangre
Estaba todo banado."

Which may be thus freely rendered:—

"When the precious heart before her
Lay all open to her view,
As if conscious of her presence,
It began to bleed anew."

The voice of Velasquez—a voice that had once been equally rich and powerful—now feebly joined its

accents with hers, as he tottered forth from the cabin, supported on the arm of his nephew, and sank into a seat which had been prepared beside her. Her tones subsided into silence as he approached.

"Nay, stop not," said he; "let me hear thee—I come out only to hear thee, for I feel not so well to-night—not well, not happy, Maria, mine. Thy voice will persuade me to a better spirit, though it sounds more sadly than is thy wont to-night; and that ballad—methinks, beauty, mine, thou wouldst never grieve over my heart, as the lovely damsel, Belerma, mourned over that of Durandarte." And he sang feebly—

"Corazon de mi senor,
Durandarte muy preciado,
En los amores dichoso,
Y en batallas desdichado."

She continued silent.

"Sing for me, Maria—deny me not;" he said entreatingly. "I know not that I shall ever ask it of thee again. I feel as if a sentence had gone forth upon me. I feel as if I had done thee wrong! My heart tells me that I have wronged thee. If thou wilt sing for me now, I know that thou forgivest me!"

"Thou shouldst not give way to such fancies, uncle, mine," said the nephew; "methinks, thou art looking better to-day than thou hast done for months past; and know I not that thou hast always been fond of Donna Maria, even as the good knight, Durandarte, was fond of the true maiden, Belerma."

"Ah! Juan; but Velasquez is no Durandarte, to find his way to the heart of a fair maiden. These days bring forth no knighthood such as his. Who is it walks behind us? Methought I heard a footstep!"

"It is none but the page, Gomez," said the nephew, in somewhat hurried accents.

A thrill ran through the veins of Maria, as she remembered that the page, Gomez, was the creature of Juan, and the person who, as a spy upon her actions, first discovered the strong intimacy between herself and Lopez de Levya. The tones of Juan betrayed to her something of his purpose, and she gathered from them the conclusion, that he meditated the performance of his crime that very night. Her heart smote her. She felt her own criminality; but she loathed the tyranny of Velasquez, as much as she did the cold and cruel selfishness of Juan; and it was only in the death of both that she could possibly hope to extricate from his desolate condition the unhappy Lopez, whom, if she did not actually love, she did not loathe, and for whom every sentiment of humanity required that she should suffer the bloody game of Juan to go on. But she looked round, at the inquiry of Velasquez, and while she detected Gomez near them, she was also enabled to discover another and a taller form among the shadows beyond him. In this person she fancied she saw Linares, and suddenly she commenced the Hymn to the Virgin, plaintive and touching, of the dying knight, Baldwin:—

"O Santa Maria Senora,
No me quieras olvidar,
A tì encomiendo mi alma,
Plegate de la guardar,
En este trance muerte,
Esfuerzo me querais dàr,
Pues a les tristes consuelas
Quieras à mì consolar.
Y à tu preciosa Hijo,
Por mì te plega rogar,
Que perdone mis pecados,
Mi alma quiera salvar."

Which in an English idiom we may render thus:—

"Holy Mary, thee beseeching,
Lo! my soul in anguish cries;
Take it to thy holy keeping,
Grant thy mercy ere it dies.
In the death-trance quickly sinking,
To thy throne for help I flee,
In my hour of terror, drinking
Consolation still from thee:
From thy precious Son, entreating
Pardon for my past career;
And the soul, its doom awaiting,
Rescue from its mortal fear."

CHAPTER IX.

She had two objects in choosing this hymn. It was the appropriate chant of Velasquez—equally for his lips and ears—at that moment of his impending peril; and she cherished the humane hope that, as in the previous song, he would join his voice with hers,

and thus utter the proper prayer to Heaven just when it would most become his lips. Her quick instincts led her also to believe that Linares would receive it as an intimation that the time was approaching when it would be necessary for him also to act. But Velasquez took no part in the hymn. His head sank upon his breast as she proceeded, and he seemed to drowse.

"Dost thou sleep, uncle?" demanded Juan.

He looked up when addressed, and, in the imperfect light, it could be seen that the eyes of the invalid were full of tears.

"The hymn saddens though it soothes me, Maria. Why didst thou choose it? Yet I blame thee not. I would I could sing it with thee. I strove, but the voice failed me, and my heart felt strange as if with a sudden sinking. I remember me to have heard that hymn, the last night that I slept in the dwelling of my poor mother, Juanita. I was innocent then! I was a lad! There was a woman who was blind—they called her Dolores—she sang it often beneath our windows, but I did not weep to hear it then as I do now. Yet I remember it well. I knew the ballad all by heart, and could have sang it with her; but I had wilder fancies, and I mocked the tenderness of her hymn with a gay ballad of some bolder spirit. I could not mock her now. Thy voice hath soothed me, Maria, but sing to me no more to-night, I feel as I would sleep. Juan, give me thy arm."

The nephew started to his feet. Maria would have offered an arm also, but Juan repulsed her.

"Not thine!" he answered, in accents not so low but that Velasquez heard them.

"And why not hers, Juan?"

"She lacks the strength! Here is Gomez."

"Maria lack the strength! Is she not well, Juan? or am I so much feebler than before? It must be so! I feel it so! Well! Give me help! Gomez be it, then."

A cold sweat covered the face and forehead of Maria de Pacheco, as she beheld the officious Gomez start forward at the summons of Juan. She saw Velasquez grasped by them, as if for support, on either side. The words of the latter—

"It is very dark—goest thou rightly, Juan?—rushed through her very brain with a dreadful import, the more terrible and startling, as, having herself receded toward the cabin, she did not see them approach. Then she was conscious that some one stood beside her. It was Linares, followed by another. She grasped his arm.

"Now, now, Linares!—It is doing! Hence! Quick! God have mercy!"

A plunge, and a most piercing shriek, were heard while she was speaking. Linares started forward. There was a sudden uproar in the ship. The alarm was given, and the men were running to and fro, while a crowd gathered on the side where the deed had been done. Another scream from the waters—a scream of agony—a cry for help—and then the stern accents of Linares prevailed over all others.

"Murderer of thy uncle—bloody traitor—I have caught thee in the act!"

"Away!" cried Juan de Silva—"and to thy duties. Behold in me thy captain!"

"Never!" was the cry from the crew. "Diego Linares!"

"The heavy hand of Linares was upon the shoulder of the culprit. His confederate, Gomez, was in the grasp of an equally powerful assailant. The proceeding had been too well devised—the action too prompt—to suffer the cunning Juan to escape by any subtleties; and he was already given to understand that the fate to which he was doomed, was that to which his uncle had been already consigned. In the suddenly aroused sense of danger which he felt, his impulse was to call for Donna Maria.

"She is here!" cried Linares.

The proud woman had recovered all her strength of soul and courage, and the conviction that the hateful and malignant spirit whom she had once feared was now wholly in her power; and she felt an exulting sense of pleasure in being able to discard the veil of hypocrisy which she had so successfully worn. She steadily advanced towards the clamorous group.

"Speak for me, Maria!" exclaimed the captive—"tell these men—say to Linares, that, in what I have done, I have but obeyed thy wishes!"

"As if my wishes should suffice to move the loving nephew to the murder of his first friend and most loving uncle!"

"Demonios! do I hear thee, woman?"

He was grappled instantly and firmly by the vigorous Linares. A dozen willing hands were nigh, to help him in the fearful deed which he designed.

"Must I perish! Has my toil of blood been taken for such as these! Maria, dost thou indeed desert me? Speak!" cried the desperate man—"Speak! thou knewest my purpose—thou didst not disclaim my deed!"

"I know thee as a felon and a fiend; as one whom I loathe and scorn! Linares, trust him not! He who would keep no terms with one so confiding as his mother's brother, will keep no terms with thee. What said I to thee before? Do thy duty to thyself and me! Revenge Velasquez, thy captain, recover the wretched Lopez de Levya from the isle where he was put to perish, and be the master of thy ship and crew!"

"This, then, was thy scheme! Demonios! that I should have been blinded by this woman's subtleties!"

"Thou wast the victim to thy own vanities—thy own quickness to crime—thy own coldness of heart!" said the proud Maria.

"Oh, tongue of the serpent! dost thou sting me thus! But thou exultest too soon. Thinkest thou that I have lived for such a fate as this! with this wealth at my girdle—with so much of life in my possession—shall I lose life? No! off there, ye base scum and offal—off! Ye shall hang for this like dogs—I will!—"

His own terrible struggles arrested his words, by which they had been stimulated. He had much to

live for, and the unwilling spirit of youth was not to be resigned so easily to the sacrifice of those delights, for which he had paid such heavy price. His strength, which was not ordinarily great, was that of desperation at the moment. He fought with wonderful spirit and address, and it tasked three stout seamen so to recover the mastery over him, as to lift him to the side of the vessel to which the feeble uncle had been beguiled, and over which he had been suddenly thrown. Brought to the verge of the precipice, he succeeded in forcing himself back, so that his head only hung over the bulwarks.—Suddenly, however, the weight of the powerful Linares was thrown upon him; and the crack of the neck, as it was thrust down upon the sharp and narrow thwarts, could have been heard even above the spasmodic gurgle and hoarse scream of the victim, by which it was accompanied. The still quivering carcass which they committed to the deep, was no longer conscious of its fate. A second plunge declared the doom of the page Gomez, whose cries had been silenced by the stroke of a dagger, while his master's death-struggles were most violent. Deep and dreary was the silence which followed on board the vessel. The rage of all parties was satisfied, and a certain, but indescribable fear was upon every heart. But none of the fruits of the struggle had been lost. A single hour had in effect rendered Maria de Pacheco, as had been promised by Juan de Silva, the mistress of the Dian de Burgos. A single sentence to Diego Linares declared the present destination of the vessel.

"The Maroon—Lopez de Levya!"

She was obeyed; the ship was brought about, and her prow turned once more in the direction of the desolate Isle of Lovers.

CHAPTER X.

Let us now return to our Maroon. Three days upon his desolate island did not materially lessen its terrors, or increase its attractions, in the eyes of Lopez de Levya. He still shuddered, not less at its fanciful and unknown dangers than at his isolation among them. But the necessity of looking about him—of looking upward, indeed—of feeling himself in motion, and realizing, as thoroughly as he could, the sense of life, as well as its consciousness of suffering—led him, at the end of this period, to make an effort, which, in his previous feeling of despair, he had never thought it possible he should make again. The nature, even of the constitutionally timid man, does not easily succumb to fortune—does not usually—except, perhaps, in the first moment of overthrow, yield itself submissively to fate. The first moment of weariness which succeeds the contest, is, perhaps, the one of greatest prostration; and, after that, the recuperative energies arouse themselves and the sufferer together. The very sense of abandonment is usually one of awakening and new resolve. This is one of the marked characteristics of the human nature. Indeed, the natural impulse of every free moral agent

is resistance. To oppose, to struggle farther—to contend to the last, and even where consciousness of the conflict itself fails—is one of the earliest, as it is one of the most necessary developments of the moral instinct. Combativeness, indeed, is one of the most important of our moral qualities. It is one which—arguing always the presence of a great and pressing necessity—is, at the same time, continually counselling the means by which to contend against it.

Lopez de Levya, though feeble, was not entirely wanting in the natural instinct; and, armed with the Spanish crossbow, and the shafts which had been accorded him—a spear, a knife, and one or two other implements of use and necessity, which might, in the event of exigency, be converted into weapons—he now proceeded to explore his empire. A sense of his possessions was also rapidly beginning to make itself felt in his reasonings. That delightful human instinct which, in the consciousness of sway, reconciles us so readily to all its dangers, was about to contribute its assistance toward comforting our Maroon in his desolation. He was, indeed, a sovereign, though he commanded no subjects. Yet, the wild-fowl which sped along the shore before his footsteps, or sprang aloft, wheeling in slow gyrations overhead, as he drew nigh their coverts, might be made to feel his authority as well as to minister to his wants. He could persecute, punish, and destroy them, quite as certainly, and certainly with less danger to himself, than if they were of his own species; and a sense of fierce delight at this consciousness of his power to do mischief, was

grateful to his heart, as it always is to that of the being who is himself peculiarly sensible to the influences of fear. He was beginning to regard with complacency a condition from which there was no escape. A thousand years might elapse, as Velasquez had malignantly assured him, without suffering the prows of any European vessel to approach so nearly to his islet as to discover the existence of its lone possessor. He must make the most of that existence. He must hoard, must economize his resources, as well of thought and enjoyment, as of covering and food. He must not destroy his subjects simply to exercise his authority. His power must be sparingly indulged for his own sake and safety. He laid aside his guitar with care and tenderness, protecting it from hurt and exposure, by hanging it beneath the friendly palm-trees where he had passed the night. In the first paroxysm of his despair and madness, conscious that this dangerous but delightful instrument was connected with his present sufferings, he was about to dash it upon the bleak sands and trample it under foot, or cast it from him into the engulfing and surrounding sea. He knew not, himself, why he forbore to do so. Some tender recollection in his thought procured its safety;—some conviction that it might minister to him in his wretched exile;—and the desperate passion which might have destroyed it—was restrained. Yet bitter were the tears that he shed over it, as, arousing from the swoon that followed the departure of the vessel from his eyes, he found the cruel memorial still about his neck, where it had been hung by the mock-

ing hands of his enemy. With the subdued temper that followed the first feeling of his despair, the instrument became doubly precious, as it not only spoke of future solace, but reminded him of former enjoyments. It constituted one of the few moral links which connected him still with the great family of man. He lacked the courage to part with any of his treasures, and the care with which he secreted his favorite instrument beneath the palm-trees, was that of the tender mother who leaves her infant for awhile, solicitous of its comfort even while she has no fears for its safety; and sometimes looking back, not with any hope to see, but that her eyes involuntarily yield themselves to the course indicated by her heart.

This charge disposed of, Lopez de Levya grasped his spear with as much martial dignity as he could command. He felt for his knife at his girdle, he slung the crossbow over his shoulder, and, ready for any event, he sallied forth to explore his empire. But though his territory was a small one, such as an adventurous spirit would have traversed wholly, and surveyed thoroughly, in the course of a single day, our Maroon was quite too timid, too cautious in his footsteps, not to make it a work of longer time. Several days were necessary to his examination. He proceeded slowly, and winding heedfully about, and probing every copse before he penetrated it, he first assured himself against any possible danger from secret foes, before he made his search satisfactory. His domain was equally ample and compact; not wanting in variety, but having its elevations of rock,

and its valley of verdure, and its long wastes and stretches of sand, in a comparatively close compass. The islet was not, as it had been thought by Velasquez, a mere series of sand-hills, raised up by the sea, the creation of its own contending billows. It was a solid rock, whose gradual ascent, nowhere rising into more than a very gentle elevation, admitted of the easy accumulation of sand and soil, which, in process of time, had in various places received a covering of very green and beautiful vegetation. The shrubbery was rather close than lofty. Among the trees were the plantain, the cocoanut, the breadfruit, and the banana. The pineapple grew in gold and purple, unobserved by man; and slender vines, which shot out from the knotted and ancient bulbs, from crevices of the rock, ran wantonly over the sides of sudden hillocks, which they garnished with blue clusters of the grape. Verily, our musician had an empire in truth. Velasquez little dreamed of the treasure he had given away in his malice. The sterile islet was a principality of fairy land, and Lopez de Levya grew more and more reconciled to life as he beheld the wealth which lay scattered around him. His possessions were beyond his wants. Nature had made ample provision, and millions might have been found, among the needy and oppressed children of Europe, to whom a life of exile and isolation in such an abode, would have been the most acceptable boon of Heaven. Nor were these vegetable possessions all that came to Lopez with his empire. Tribes of small wild animals wantoned before his footsteps, scarcely

seeming to fear his presence; and the nimble little marmozet of the tropics, with a petty, playful mischief, darting before him as he came, would fling the nuts from the tree-tops, and chatter, in equal fun and defiance, at his sovereign authority. Our Maroon began to grow interested in his possessions, and fate soon conducted him to other discoveries. His island, stretching away from north to south, was exceedingly long in proportion to its width. He had been landed at the northern extremity, at which point it had been impossible to conceive its dimensions, except from its width, and this had led to conclusions which gave no reason to suppose its extent to be half so great as Lopez found it. At the close of the third day of his explorations, he had nearly reached its southern extremity. He had found the land gradually to rise as he advanced, until, toward the close, taken in comparison with the uniform level of the sand and sea surrounding the spot to which he approached, and by which the island was terminated in this quarter, he discovered what might be considered a moderate mountain. It was certainly a large and imposing hill, seen from the low shores or the waters which surrounded them. Here, too, the groves thickened into something like a forest. Heated by his ramble, and somewhat fatigued, as the day was wearing to its close, he passed gladly for shelter into the shady recesses of its heights. He soon found himself in one of the coolest realms of shade which he had ever traversed. A natural pathway, as it seemed, conducted him forward. Gradually advancing, he at length emerged from the

thicket only to stand upon the brow of a rugged eminence, which rose almost perpendicularly, overlooking the sea. A small flat of sandy beach lay at his feet, which was evidently subject to overflow at the rising of the tide. Not half a mile beyond could be seen a small cluster of little rocks, just peering above the sea, scarcely bigger, it would seem, than so many human heads, which the waves covered at high water. Between them, he could distinguish the boiling and striving of the billows, which sent up a sheeted shower far above the rocks with which they strove. Long lines, stretching from several points, and losing themselves among these rocks, betrayed the course of strong currents, which were caused by the capricious whirlpools that lay within their embrace. The eye of Lopez took in all these objects, but they did not bound his survey. Stretching far beyond—did he only fancy, or did he really behold a slender dark speck, which might be the outline of a shore corresponding with that on which he stood?—miles of ocean lay between them, but in that unclouded realm of sunshine and of calm, objects might be seen from an eminence, such as that on which he stood, at a surprising distance. It was only in glimpses now that he beheld, or fancied, the object in his gaze. Sometimes it would utterly disappear—but this might be from the continued and eager tension of his vision;—again would it grow out boldly beneath his eyes;—but this might be in obedience only to the desires of his mind. Long and feverishly did he watch, and many were his conjectures as to the distant empire which his hope or his

sight had conjured up. He turned away, and his glances rested upon the smooth plain of yellow sand beneath his feet, which lay inviting to his tread, glistening a thousand fires from bits of crystal, which reflected the now waning sunlight. To this little esplanade, which looked so exceedingly inviting, our Maroon was persuaded to descend from his heights, by finding a convenient series of rude steps, which wound below —little gaps in the hill-side, or fractures in the naked rock, which one might almost be tempted to imagine —so admirable was the assistance which they gave to the anxious footsteps—had been the work of art. Following these, Lopez descended to the hard and sandy floor, and standing in the shadow of the rock, he once more looked forth eagerly upon the doubtful waste of sea. There still lay the empire of his desire. It was along, and over those billows that he was yet to see the glimmer of a saving hope. Such was still his dream, and, seating himself upon the sand, he inscribed almost unconsciously the names of Spain, of the Dian de Burgos, and of the lowly hamlet in his own country, from which he had been persuaded regretfully to wander. Then followed rude outlines of the ship which had abandoned him, and then, naturally enough, a portrait, something less rude, of the fair but passionate woman, for whose fatal love he was suffering the dreadful doom of exile and isolation. His own name was written, but as quickly obliterated, and musing over the melancholy record, his heart failed him, and he sank forward, prone, upon the faint memorials which the rising waters would soon wash

away forever. Thus he lay moaning for many weary minutes, till all at once a coldness fell upon him which chilled him to the heart, and aroused him to more immediate apprehensions. The shadow of the hill beneath which he lay was upon him. The sun was slowly receding from the heights. Starting to his feet, he turned to reascend the hill, and recoiled with a feeling little short of horror, as he beheld the huge mouth of a cavern yawning directly upon him. This cavern was open to the sea. Its waters, at their rising, passing the little stretch of sand upon which he had lain, glided into the dim hollow, which now looked grimly threatening upon the easily alarmed spectator. The opening was not a very large one, but would easily admit of the passage of three or more persons at a time. Its lips were covered with a soft and beautiful clothing of green moss, which made the darkness within seem yet more dismal. Long grasses, and thick shrubs and vines hanging over from above, contributed to increase the solemnity of its aspect, as showing the depth and certainty of its solitude; and the deep silence which prevailed within, added still more greatly to the impressive influence with which it possessed the soul of the Maroon, while he timidly yet eagerly gazed upon the opening. At the first discovery of this domain of solemnity and silence, he receded almost to the sea. He was not encouraged by the stillness. A voice from within, the cry of a beast, the rush of a bird's wing—had been more encouraging. His advance was very gradual—but he did advance, his doubts being much less easy of en-

durance than the absolute presence of a real cause of apprehension. With trembling nerves he presented his spear, and got his knife in readiness. The spear was thrust deep into the throat of the cavern, but it provoked no disquiet within. Then, his hair erecting itself, and his heart rising in his throat as he advanced, he at length fairly made his way into the subterranean dwelling. There he shouted, and the sounds came rolling back upon him from so many hollow voices within, that he once more recoiled from the adventure, and hurried back in terror to the entrance.

CHAPTER XI.

But he gathered courage for a second trial. The answering echoes were not followed by any evil, though they seemed to mock his ears with a laughter such as he had heard from the tyrant of the Dian de Burgos, when he devoted him to his melancholy exile. He passed again into the cavern, taking care, by his own silence, to provoke no such fearful responses as those which had driven him forth. A few feet brought him to a small dark pool which lay directly in his pathway, and which left but a narrow space between its own margin and the walls of the cavern. This he sounded with his spear, and found to be shallow. It was a lakelet left by the waves of ocean, by which, at its overflow, the cave was evidently penetrated. Passing this pool, our Maroon found himself upon

a dry floor, the foundation of which was the solid rock; but a slender coating of soil had formed upon it, which was, in turn, clothed with a nice smooth covering of green and velvet-like moss. Here he was gladdened by a glimpse of the sun, which, breaking through a chink in the rock, a slender crevice, glided along the rugged vault-side, affording to the timid adventurer a more perfect idea of an angel presence than he had ever before possessed. Another opening in the rock, almost immediately above, afforded sufficient light for his examination of the whole interior. The cave narrowed to a still slenderer gap, as he advanced, than was the one by which he had entered. This was the entrance to another apartment. It was some time before he ventured to enter this, and not until he had thrust his spear its full length into its recesses. He then clambered up, for the elevation of this inner chamber was greater than the first. Here he was again refreshed with brief glimpses of the sunlight, which, peeping in through two openings of the rock, looked like two of the most natural and smiling eyes in the world. This apartment, though of less height, was of larger area than the other. It soon afforded him new subjects of curiosity if not alarm. In the centre of the chamber stood a rock, scarcely larger than a blacksmith's anvil, and having something of the appearance of one, on which lay the remains of a fire. Brands lay half consumed, the fires of which were now extinguished; but the ashes were there, still undisturbed, as if the flame had only recently gone out. Piles of an aromatic gum lay upon a shelf

of the rock, and other piles, in slender fragments of wood, of which our Maroon knew nothing, lay contiguous also. But what more than anything beside arrested and confounded our Maroon, were certain numerous shreds of dark hair, soft, fine, and very long, like the hair of women, which hung neatly tied in separate volumes from the tops of reeds, which were stuck about the vaulted roof of the cavern, and wherever a crevice could be found sufficiently large in which to introduce their slender extremities. Examining several of these shreds of hair, the wonder of the explorer was increased to discover that the ends of them were shrivelled as in the flame. There were other objects to excite his surprise, if not to occasion his alarm. Baskets of shells and pebbles, flowers which had decayed, a bow and many arrows—all of the latter being broken—and a heavy string of large pearls which had been slightly injured in the fire, but which Spanish cupidity readily conceived would still possess considerable value in the Cuba market.

CHAPTER XII.

HERE, then, was a curious discovery. The island was not inhabited. He had traversed it for three days, and had found no footstep but his own. Had it ever been inhabited? Scarcely; the impunity with which beast and bird enjoyed its securities, and of which he had sufficient proofs in his three days' experience, was

conclusive of that question. But that it was visited by human beings, the witnesses in the cavern were numerous. Did they come frequently, for what purpose, and from whence? These were the next questions. That they came frequently might be inferred from various circumstances. The brands which had been swept from the altar, were in great heaps in one corner of the cavern. The shreds of hair were equally numerous and of different degrees of age. This difference was very perceptible upon the slightest examination. They came for a religious purpose. The shreds of hair, the altar, the aromatic woods and gum —were all significant of sacred rites. From whence? Surely, was the thought of the Maroon, from that isle, or continent, the dim outlines of which had fixed his gaze but an hour before. A farther search led to farther discoveries, but all of the same character. Vast stores of these shreds of hair, seemingly the accumulation of centuries, were found in remote crannies and dark recesses of the vault. A thousand little baskets of shells, and white and blue fragments —pebbles that seemed like glass—and more precious in the sight of Lopez, numerous strands of pearl, such as he had already discovered—which, dark and dingy with frequent smokes in the cavern, he found could be made clean by a little water. In a recess of the rock, the most obscure, he made the discovery of a niche which had evidently been used for a couch. It was softly lined with moss and leaves, and there were flowers in bunches at the head and feet which might have been grasped by the hands of youth and beauty.

The impression of the head was perceptible upon a pillow of moss at one extremity, and suggested to our Maroon the idea of a far more comfortable couch for himself than any which he had yet found upon his island. The sun had been rapidly sinking while he had been urging his researches, and the cheerless dusk of the horizon without, as he emerged from the cavern determined him once more to return to its recesses. He did so, and, ascending the mysterious recess in the inner chamber, though with some hesitation, he soon sunk into a deep slumber, in which, though he dreamed of strange forms and aspects about him, he dreamed of nothing to impair the virtue of his sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

But, with his awakening thoughts, apprehension, rather than pride or exultation, followed the consciousness of his new discoveries. Had he not reason to fear the return of the strange people by whom the isle was visited, as it would seem, periodically? That they were a barbarous people he could not doubt; that they would resent his presence, and treat him as an enemy, he had every reason to dread. He should be a victim to some one of their cruel sacrifices. He should be immolated on the altars of one of the bloody deities of the Caribbean worship. The man brave by nature, and in the situation of Lopez de Levya, might well entertain such apprehensions. How much more

vividly would they occur to the imagination of one so timid and feeble of soul as our Maroon. They kept him—assuming various forms of terror—in a cold sweat for several days; and though the impression was naturally weakened and dissipated the more familiar the images became, yet any immediately impelling thought brought them back upon his spirit with a ghastly and withering influence. Three days elapsed after this discovery before he found himself able to recur to it without a vague and overpowering sense of terror. But the pearls shone in his eyes. He had grown wealthy on a sudden. He drew forth the numerous strings which he found suspended in the cavern. Every Spaniard of that day had an instinctive appreciation of treasure. Lopez had never seen so much riches at a glance before. He examined his pearls in the sunlight. He cleansed them of their impurities by the ocean's side. And he was the master of all this glitter. He had never dreamed of such vast possessions. In Spain—but when he thought of Spain, and felt the probability, in all its force, that he should never again behold its shores, he was almost moved in his desperation to fling his newly found treasure into the deep. But the latent hope, which dreamed of the possible approach of some future mariner, forbade the sacrifice; and restoring his possessions to the dark crevices from whence he had taken them, he stretched himself out upon the eminence which vaulted his possessions, and which had now become with him a favorite place of watch, to gaze upon

the broad plain of ocean by which he was girded on every hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

No sign of hope for the Maroon. The sun shines with a red and scorching influence. There is not a cloud in the sky to curtain the brazen terrors of his countenance. The ocean sleeps, smooth as glass, unbroken in its wilderness of range, spread out like an endless mirror of steel, that fired the very brain to gaze upon. And in the sky, on the return of night, might be seen the moon, bright but placid, nearly at her full, giving to the scene something of an aspect melancholy, such as she habitually wears herself. Not a speck upon the waters—not a speck—and, while the lull continues, no possibility of a sail in sight. He looks toward the faint uncertain line of shore, which he has fancied to be beyond him on the south. It is no fancy now. It is certain. The subdued waves lessen the usual obstacles of vision. The line of land, if it be land, and no mocking cloud, appears to rise. It undulates. There are inequalities which strike his eye, and which, seen at that distance, cannot be subject to doubt or disbelief. He trembles with mixed feelings of hope and terror as he comes to this conclusion. Once more to behold the human form—once more to look upon the friendly aspect of man, and to say, "Brother!" But will the aspects

be friendly that shall look upon him from that shore? Will they hearken to his cry of pleading? Will they understand him when he uses the endearing title of "brother," to the savage chief who leads the marauding party? These suggestions but fill our Maroon with dismay.

Crouching in the shade, his eye fixed on the opposite shores, as he believes them, he starts suddenly to his feet. He passes his hand across his brows—his fingers press his eyes, as if to remove some speck, some foreign atom, from his vision. Can he believe his eyes? Does he, indeed, behold an object upon the waters approaching him from that doubtful and hostile shore? He sees—but now it disappears. It is gone! He looks in vain, his whole frame convulsed and quivering with the emotions of his soul! Again it rises into view. It disturbs the smooth surface of the deep. The brightness of the mirror is shaded by a speck, and that speck grows upon his sight. He can doubt no longer. It is a boat which he beholds—it brings with it a savage enemy—the fierce cannibal of the Caribbean Sea! He drops his spear and his crossbow—his hand grapples, not his knife, but his rosary. He falls upon his knees—he counts the beads with hurried hand and failing memory. He clutches the agnus Dei—he strains it to his lips, and with many a broken invocation to some favorite saint, he hurries away to put himself in shelter.

His search has fortunately enabled him to find many places of temporary hiding, such as would

probably suffice for safety during the stay—which was evidently brief always—of the savages by whom the islet was visited. At first, he thought of occupying a dense piece of copse, which lay at a little distance in the rear of the elevation in which the cavern was found. But a doubt whether this would not be penetrated, in a desultory ramble of the intruders after fruit, and a curious desire to be in some situation, which would enable him to watch their proceedings, led him to abandon this idea. The cave itself was obviously one of their places of greatest resort. It was here that their religious rites were performed. The islet itself was unemployed. It was a place set apart and sacred to some special and superior purpose. The vaulted chamber was the place of their mysteries. He determined that it should be the place of his concealment. He had sought out all its secret places. He had seen that certain of their remains—their shreds of hair—their baskets of shell—their broken arrows—had been undisturbed for a long season; and behind these, in convenient fissures of the rock, which were wholly unlighted by the day, he prepared to bestow himself. The suggestions of the naturally timid person, under a consciousness of approaching danger, are usually prompt enough. Lopez de Levya hurried to execute the plan he had conceived. He entered the cave, ere yet the strangers could behold any movement on the shore. His provisions—a supply for several days, at least, had been already transferred to the safe-keeping of the vaulted apartment. These were all disposed of, conveniently to

his reach, in the crevice of the rock in which his own person was to find security. And, all prepared, he planted himself within the mouth of the cave, anxiously looking forth—yet not so as to be seen—for the unknown object of his apprehension.

CHAPTER XV.

THE strange object is indeed a boat—a large canoe with two banks of oars—one of those long and stately barges in which the Caribbean was wont to go forth for war or ceremonial. Its sides were gaudily and richly painted. Its poop was raised with a triumphal canopy of dyed cotton above it. Its prow was lofty and sharp, and bore, for a figure-head, the savage jaws of a cayman, or American crocodile. The rowers of the boat were men, but all besides were women. These were eight in number—seven who sat forward, and near the prow, and one who sat in the stern alone and under the canopy. The course of the boat was regulated by the oarsmen. The women at the prow were all richly clad in stained cotton garments. Their heads were tressed with strands of pearl—their necks, which were bare, were covered with similar decorations. Each, in her hands, bore a bunch of arrows and a basket. Beside them might be seen other baskets of aromatic gums and bundles of wood similarly aromatic. These females were all evidently matrons, none of them being less than thirty years

of age, and all of them wearing the experience of look and bearing which is common to those who have been mothers. But she, who sat alone at the stern, was evidently none of these. She could not have been more than fifteen years old, and looked wild and startled as a young fawn, for the first time venturing forth without its dam in company. She was quite as beautiful as she was young; her skin less dark than was usual among the Caribbean Indians—not much more dark, indeed, than was that of the Spaniard—and the red blood coursing at moments from her heart into her cheeks, suffusing it with the most exquisite tints of innocence and youth. She was well formed and tall. Her hair streamed down over her back and shoulders. Her bosom was quite bare, without pearl or any other ornament. Her dress was of white cotton, purely white, without any of those rich and gaudy dyes, which were so freely used by her people. Before her was a small earthen vessel half covered, from which a slight smoke continued to ascend, as if from a hidden fire below. Into this, at intervals, the maiden might be seen to fling a fine powder, which she scooped out of a gourd that lay beside her. Numerous baskets of flowers and shells lay at her feet, and a bunch of arrows rested upon her lap. The oarsmen were all habited as warriors. Their brows were grave. No words passed among them or among the women, until, as they drew nigh the shore, the latter suddenly broke out into a wild, and not unmusical chant, which made our Maroon recoil within his vaulted chamber, with an indefinite sense of terror. At this sound

the rowers dropped their oars—the boat lay upon her centre, and the women prepared to leave her, though they were still more than thirty paces from the shore. But the water was exceedingly shallow where the vessel lay;—the beach which formed the esplanade of the cave, stretching out boldly for some distance into the sea. Availing themselves of their knowledge of the bar, the women stepped forth upon a ridge, where the ocean, disarmed of its billows, swept along gently to the level of their knees. They brought forth their billets of fragrant wood—their baskets of shell—their sheaves of arrows—their vessels of odorous gums and incense. Then, taking the damsel from beneath the canopy at the stern, they bore her, with anxious solicitude upon their shoulders from the vessel to the shore—her feet and drapery being kept sacred from the waves. One of their number seemed to counsel and direct the rest, and it was with feelings of new horror, that our Maroon beheld in her grasp, as she led the way to the cavern, a sharp broad instrument of stone, that greatly resembled a butcher's cleaver. His apprehensions were not now for himself. For what was the unhappy damsel destined? For the sacrifice? For what crime—what penance—what terrible superstition? To appease the malice of what bloody god, was this poor child, so young, so beautiful—so evidently innocent—to be made the victim? Her sad and fearful looks—the tears which now gathered in her eyes—the wild chant of the women, and the stern, grave aspects of the men—these all seemed to denote an occasion of woe and terror. The men did not leave

the boat; they drew no nearer to the land. The shore seemed to be a consecrated one, which the masculine footstep was not allowed to pollute. The girl, still borne upon the arms of the women, and following her who seemed to be the officiating priestess, was carried into the cavern; the wild chorus of the women being resumed as they entered the gloomy portals, and reverberating from the walls within, with a sound at once sweet, awful, and inspiring.

CHAPTER XVI.

Our Maroon was already crouched, close, in his place of hiding. He beheld in silence and safety, but with an awful beating at the heart, the whole of the strange procession. He saw the women circling the altar stone with wild contortions and a strange unearthly song. He saw them, from several branches of wood, draw forth the billets, with which they kindled a flame upon the stone. The fire was drawn from the vessel which had been supplied with fuel on the voyage by the hand of the young damsel. She sat apart, on a low projection of the wall, to which she had been conducted, and but a few paces from the cavity in which Lopez found retreat. She took no part in the ceremony, though she seemed deeply interested in its progress. At certain pauses in the wild incantations, particularly when certain emphatic sounds or words closed the chant, she clasped her

hands aloft, and her groan was audible, as if in supplication. The fire began to blaze suddenly above the stone, and its strange gleams played in lively tints upon the gloomy walls of the cavern. Then the circling dance and the chorus were renewed. Then at certain sounds the women paused, and at such moments, the maiden rose, and, approaching the flame, threw into it fragments of wood or gum with which she had been supplied. At all such additions, the flame blazed up more brightly, and the chant was more wild and vigorous than ever. At length it ceased; and in an instant, every woman crouched down around the stone where she stood, except the one who seemed to act as priestess. She did not join in the chorus of the others, but in a low chant of her own performed some separate office. She now approached the maiden, and conducted her toward the altar. At her words, the damsel bent over the heads of the kneeling women separately, and her tears fell fast as she murmured in their several ears. She took from the necks of each her strands of pearl. They themselves unbound them from their own tresses, which now hung down mournfully, of great length, from every shoulder. The pearls were collected by the priestess and laid apart. Our Maroon, from his place of watch, followed with keen eyes, and saw where she laid them. The women now receded. The girl embraced them each, with a deep sobbing, and they responded with mingling sighs and songs, while passing out of the chamber in which they left her with the officiating woman. When their voices

were heard only faintly from the sea-shore, where they had now assembled, the maiden was conducted to the altar-place by her matron-like companion. Her mournful utterance announced some sadder ceremonial. The girl answered her by a cry, and threw herself at her feet before the altar. The woman knelt upon one knee. The head of the maiden was supported upon the other from which the long black hair depended, half shrouding the drapery of the priestess. Very tender were the few words which then passed between the two. The girl clasped her hands together, and her tearful eyes were full of the sweetest but saddest resignation. The woman smoothed her tresses out with her fingers, stooped and kissed affectionately the lips of the child, and while everything betokened nothing less than the truest sympathy, and the most heartfelt and generous affection between them, what was the horror of our Maroon—now deeply interested in the event—to see the woman possess herself of the broad knife of stone which lay on the foot of the altar. Timid and feeble as he was of soul, his fingers clutched his knife with a convulsive resolution, which, in the case of a braver spirit, would have long before declared itself in action!

CHAPTER XVII.

The moment in which the Indian damsel lay thus prostrate, and at the mercy of one who seemed about to complete the rites in which she had been engaged, by the sacrifice of the innocent creature in her grasp, was a moment of the most cruel humiliation to the imbecile Spaniard. His sensibilities were violently excited. Every sympathy of his heart was awakened. His better nature, his human training, his Christian teaching—such as it was possible for him to acquire in that day of constant war and rapine—were all active in urging him to adventure his own life in saving her who seemed about to perish before him. She too, so young, so resigned, and—not the least consideration—so really beautiful. But the necessary nerve was wanting to the Maroon. He who dared not the single stroke, though prompted by the woman he professed to love, when it would have saved her from shame, and himself from the bitter exile which he now endured, was not likely to exhibit any rashness, any ordinary courage, though with such a threatening spectacle of death before him.

Happily for humanity, his apprehensions were all idle. The meditated sacrifice in which the priestess was about to officiate, contemplated not the life, but the long and flowing locks of the damsel. These were severed at a stroke, and hung up in the chamber, from an arrow, the shaft of which was made to pene-

trate a crevice in the rock. Then the maiden rose, and taking the bunch of arrows which she had brought, she snapped them in twain before the altar, which the matron still continued to supply with aromatic gums and fuel. Some further ceremonies were performed—there was a solemn imposition of hands, while the virgin knelt before the priestess, and the lips of the latter were glued to the forehead of the girl. A brief dialogue, in subdued and murmuring tones, passed between them, and then the voices of both rose in a wild, sad chant, the burden of which was caught up by the voices of the females without. One embrace followed the subsidence of the strain, and the matron and the virgin parted—the former hurrying from the cavern, and the latter sinking down, in an agony of fear and grief, before the fitful blaze upon the altar.

Lopez de Levya drew a long breath. He began to grow courageous. The voices of the women without were dying away in the distance. Could they have retired to the boat, and could they be returning to the distant shore from whence they came, leaving the maid alone, as he himself had been left. Her evident sorrow and apprehension declared this to be the case. But it was evident that no such feeling moved her abandonment as had occasioned his. The proofs of a deep and tender interest had been shown her to the last. He had heard the sighs, the moans, the murmurs of the officiating matron. He had witnessed her fond caresses of the damsel. He had heard with quivering sensibilities, the wild sad chant of the at-

tending women, whose song still feebly fell upon his senses from without.

The scene which he had witnessed was a religious ceremony. But what did it contemplate? Was the maiden thus left to herself—and to him—destined for a sacrifice—to perish at last, before the altars of some strange and savage divinity? It might be so; but certainly no such purpose was designed at present, for he did not fail to perceive that an ample supply of food was left with her, sufficient for a month's consumption. Or, was she destined, herself, to become a priestess, officiating, like the matron, who had left her, in the same and other mysterious rites, hereafter? This was the more probable conjecture. At least, such was the thought to which, after a rapid mental survey of probabilities, our Maroon arrived. Perhaps a little more deliberation might have rendered it doubtful whether the innumerable signs which the walls of the chamber presented, of repeated ceremonials like the present, were not proofs that the proceeding could not regard any such appropriation of the neophyte. It was a ceremonial evidently common to the tribe or nation. It was one through which, at a certain period, each virgin had to pass. It was indeed, a dedicatory, but it was an invocatory service also. We may, in this place, briefly declare the object of the ceremonial.

Among the Caribbeans, as among the aborigines of the New World in most quarters, both sexes were dedicated, separately, and by different rites, to fortune. The period in life when they were to emerge from the

salutary restraints of the parent, and to be left to the assertion of their own wits, and the exercise of their own intelligence, was that chosen in which to solicit for them the protection of the gods, who should confer upon them some especial spiritual guide and guardian. To propitiate the gods for this favor—to move them to an indulgent dispensation—to secure a friendly and favoring protector, and to inspire the young with wisdom, courage, and faithfulness, were the objects of the ceremonial. In the case of males, they were thus consecrated when able to commence the labors of the chase. They were subjected to severer ordeals than the other sex, since the leading desire, with them, was their proper endowment with hardihood and courage. Long abstinence from food, exposure to cold, and frequent stratagems by which to alarm them and try their courage, were resorted to by those having charge of their initiate. The maidens were more gently entreated. Isolation, rather than exposure, was the influence employed upon their courage. Food was provided them, but of a sort rather to inflame the fancies than the blood. This was to be chastened rather than exhilarated. Roots of rare efficacy, the virtues of which they knew—herbs which assailed the brain and the nervous system, were silently mingled with the food which was left for their sustenance, and the very fumes of the aromatic woods and gums with which they were appointed to feed their daily and nightly fires, possessed a partially intoxicating effect upon those who continued to inhale them. It was while under such influences that the visions of the

youth were to be observed with heed. The images that were most frequent in their dreams—the scenes which they witnessed—the voices that they heard—the laws which were declared—these were to be the oracles by which their whole succeeding lives were to be regulated. By these the young warrior was to be guided in the chase or the conflict, and the young woman, in the keeping of her household, the training of her young, and the exercise of her sympathies and tastes. The favorite or leading aspect, or object, in their visions, was to become their guiding spirit forever after. It was customary in many tribes, perhaps in most, to adopt this object as their mark or sign; —and this was the *totem*, inscribed upon the arm or breast—not dissimilar to those of knighthood in the Middle Ages, drawn from favorite objects of sight, or the events most conspicuous in their lives; with this difference, that, in Europe, the *totem* was inscribed upon the shield, the surcoat, or the pennon—among the savages of the New World, upon the naked person.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Night came on in the vaulted chamber of the lovely isle, occupied only by the Indian damsel and the Maroon. Without all was silent, except, now and then, the bark of the marmozet as he bounded among the cocoanut-trees above. Several hours had elapsed since the sounds of the wild chant of the women had

failed upon his ears, yet our Spaniard maintained his place of hiding with religious quietude. Meanwhile, the girl fed the fires upon her altar. She sat upon a rude swelling of the rocky floor, her hands folded in her lap, and the ends of her shortened hair resting upon her shoulders. Her form was rather between the Maroon and the fire, the blaze of which, as she heightened it by occasional supplies of fuel, made marvellously distinct, in his eyes, the exquisite outline of her delicate but well-marked profile. And thus she sat, and such was her only office, for several hours more.

It must have been full midnight, when our Spaniard, who had not slept an instant, discovered that sleep had seized upon the senses of the Indian damsel. Her form subsided into an attitude favorable to rest. She sank upon one side, her head resting upon a sudden elevation of the floor, which conducted to the niche which seemed to have been employed as a couch on previous occasions, and where, for the last two nights, Lopez himself had taken his rest. Her breathing was soft and regular. It denoted a calm and perfect sleep. He was encouraged and gradually withdrew from his place of concealment. His steps were cautiously taken. He drew nigh to the sleeper—surveyed her with a keen and pleasant interest;—then, farther to be sure, he stole forth into the antechamber of the vault, and gliding cautiously, maintaining a vigilant watch all the while, he emerged from the cavern, and stood upon the beach. The waters of the sea had gone down. The gray sands were quite un-

covered for a long stretch, the spot being wholly bare upon which the Indian bark had anchored during the afternoon. The moon was high in heaven, and at her full. No cloud obscured or sullied the blue serenity of the skies. The scene was eminently and wholly spiritual. There was nothing human visible in the surrounding aspects of ocean, sky, and land. Satisfied of this, our Maroon returned, with rather hurried footsteps, to the cavern. He stole back cautiously, however, so as not to disturb the damsel. She still slept, her position being totally unchanged. But the fire had grown faint upon her altars. He fed it with a handful of the fuel that lay contiguous. He knelt beside her, and in the reviving blaze, he examined closely the innocent features, which he had thought so very sweet and beautiful in the before imperfect light. The nearer survey did not lessen her loveliness in his sight. Her closed eyes, and her slightly parted lips, were studies for the sculptor, they were so delicate in their structure, yet so admirably defined. The features might have been thought Castilian. The forehead was high but narrow, the nose good, and the neck moderately large and smooth, rising into the gentle swell of a bosom which had not yet learned to heave with other than happy childish emotions. One of her hands, the fingers of which were long and taper, had stolen to her breast, the partial drapery of which it seemed to grasp. The other lay at her side, the fingers closing upon a handful of wood intended for the fire. Thus she slept.

The Maroon stooped and pressed his lips closely

upon hers, she sighed deeply, but moved not. Again he repeated the kiss, and her eyes opened upon him. They closed involuntarily. Again they opened, and now with a wild, appealing expression. He had slightly retreated, as he found her about to waken. He had regained his feet. He stood somewhat apart, the altar being in some degree between them.

We have spoken of the personal appearance of Lopez de Levya as being pleasing to the eye of woman. At this moment it looked manly as well as pleasing; and, in the doubtful light of the cavern, with his form erect, his features half shaded by the gloom, his knife at his girdle, and a rich red scarf about his waist, he might have served for the model of one of those brigands, a compound of Orson and Adonis, whom we see so commonly in Italian pictures. The impression was not unfavorable upon the eyes of the Indian damsel. But her senses had evidently mingled the aspect before her with the object in her dream—the purpose of her watch and ordeal—the beneficent creature vouchsafed by her savage gods, from whose guidance her future destiny was to be shaped and governed. The instincts of the Spaniard were sufficiently acute to see the impression that he had made, and to conjecture, in some measure, its origin. He was well aware that the first impression of the European upon the aborigines was that of a superior being. The devout appealing eyes of the damsel—her hands crossed upon her breast—satisfied our Maroon that she held him to be so. He advanced a single step, he smiled on her kindly, he raised one hand upward to

heaven, while he placed the other on his heart. She followed all his movements with others like them. Her hand was lifted to heaven, and carried to her breast. She too smiled—the smile of innocent hope, that might have brought with it warmer assurances. He spoke sweetly and tenderly, but the words were lost upon incapable but not unheeding senses. She shook her head with a mournfulness of look that told him, plain as words could speak, how sorrowful she was that she knew not what he said. But he smiled encouragingly, and resorted once more to signs to assure her of his affection. These she understood.

The language of the heart is a very universal one. Charity and sympathy may speak and be understood, though they have not a word in common with the hearer, from the centre to the pole. She answered his signs. She pointed to the fires before her. She threw a fresh supply of fuel upon the blaze, then rising to her knees, knelt before him, and crossed her hands upon her bosom. He stooped, and took her in his arms. She would have receded, but he held her tenderly in his grasp, and once more pressed his lips upon hers. She sank submissive in his embrace. She spoke but a single sentence, but one of its words smote his ear like a familiar accent. He had picked up a few of the Caribbean phrases from Spaniards who had been among this people. The girl had designated him as "the good White Spirit." The word "spirit" had become a frequent one in the intercourse of the Jesuit missionaries with the heathen. God, and love, and heaven, good, bad, the sky, the sea, the

boat, Castile, white and red man—these, and several other words had, from the communion of the Spaniards with the tribes of the Caribbean Sea, grown to be a tolerably common property with the two races. Lopez rapidly ran over in the ears of the girl all of this description which he found it easy to remember on the instant. Some of these she repeated after him with ready acquiescence. Again she described him as the good white spirit—*her* good white spirit—and he now understood her.

He did not disabuse her. He feared to forfeit her reverence, in seeking to awake a humbler emotion; and as the master of her destiny, a celestial visitant, provided for her guidance, he proceeded to enforce her affections. He placed himself beside her—together they supplied the altar with fuel and incense, and when he kissed her lips, she crossed her arms upon her breast, and submitted with delighted reverence.

It was the benevolent spirit whose favor she implored, who then, in his most gracious aspect, presented himself in compliance with her invocations. She had been taught to believe that he was difficult of approach—slow to be won—reluctant to appear;—that it required earnest and long-continued devotions, and a painful and protracted vigil. How fortunate was she among her sex, that, in her instance, he had departed from his wonted severity!—that, instead of presenting himself, as he was reported frequently to have done—in harsh and ungenial aspects—in the shape of bird, or beast, or reptile—he had assumed his noblest attributes of form, and put on features not

only of the highest, but of the tenderest character. Verily, she was the favored among women! The tones of the Spaniard's voice were to her sounds of the sweetest music from the Caribbean heaven. His smile was that glance of the morning or of the evening, when the brightness is equally rare and benignant; and, when his hand rested upon her cheek or neck, she felt the thrill of an emotion through all her veins, such as she had been taught to believe was vouchsafed only to the favored few, the select of the Caribbean Elysium. Their eyes took part in their constant intercourse, and never had Lopez looked or spoken with so successful eloquence. Though she comprehended but few of his words, yet nothing was thrown away of all that fell from his lips. As at the first, in the primal hour of creation, the speech which Heaven bestowed upon its creatures was that of love, so love constitutes the basis of that ancient language which it is still so easy for the heart to comprehend. Assisted by this heart-manual, it was easy for Lopez to make his Spanish and her Indian words subservient to their gradual use; and ere they sunk exhausted into the mutual arms of sleep that night, they had commenced a course of study quite as rapid as the Robertsonian method, by which a modern or ancient dialect is to be mastered in six lessons.

The bridal hour of the two exiles thus strangely brought together, promised to be as happy in its progress, as the destiny in which it had its origin was solemn and peculiar. With the dawn, the two awakened to neither repining nor repentance. Life had

suddenly put on her loveliest aspects to both. The Spaniard was no longer lonesome in his solitude, and the damsel was happy in the faith that she was favored among women, by the very deity to whom her sex devotes the most dutiful and earnest solicitations.

CHAPTER XIX.

The passion thus begun, and sanctioned, as it would seem, by an especial Providence, was neither slow to ripen nor of modified character. The very isolation of their abode, separated from all the world beside, tended to compel their affections eagerly, and into the same channel. But it was not long before the Indian damsel learned to comprehend the purely human character of her companion. Her very love produced this discovery, since it could only exist in its natural intensity in the untutored mind, in the comparative loss of its veneration. The young Spaniard no longer repined at his desolate condition. The fate to which he resigned himself had received its consolations, and in the first few days of his happiness, if he thought at all of his late comrades, it was with something of fear and misgiving, lest they should come and tear him away from an abode in which he was equally free and happy.

The morning after their first meeting, he stole from her side while she yet slept, and from the antechamber of the cavern awakened her with a soft sweet

strain from his guitar. It was the first time he had touched the strings since the instrument had been hung about his neck in mockery. She started from the mossy niche where she lay, and lighting anew the fire upon her altars, sank before it in the attitude of prayer. A delirious delight was visible upon her countenance as the music reached her ears, and when Lopez looked in upon her, she bore the expression of one whose whole soul was lifted with a sense of the Divine favor. He made the guitar the instrument for her education. She had the sweetest voice herself, and for his music, gave him wild ballads of her own people, of which he could appreciate the music only. But their words were rapidly interchanged. The lessons were constant, and conveyed through numerous media of which the teacher in civilized life can have no notion. Life itself depended on their progress, and when this is the case, the tuition must be marvellously rapid—love as life—their daily sports, their mutual progress—the exercise of their tastes—their consultations upon sea, and sky, and grove, the passage of the wild bird—the bound of the marmozet—the gathering of fruit—the song, the dance, the sigh, the smile—all these provoked their lessons and exercised their industry in acquisition. It was not long before they declared themselves in syllables that took the place of simple sounds—not long before the teacher could listen with delight to the childish prattler at his side, whose accents would have seemed uncouth in the ears of critics only. Day by day, teaching and taught, the horizon of their hopes and affections sensibly ex-

panded before their minds, and the damsel did not cease to be less innocent because she had learned not only to understand her own emotions, but to comprehend the real nature of the companion from whom she had learned the first great lesson of the woman heart. She was not less happy that, in losing a God, she had found a lover and a Lord!

CHAPTER XX.

The world for a brief season seemed wholly surrendered to them. They lived for each other only; and as they saw no other forms, so they forgot for a time, that they were to be disturbed by other beings of a nature like their own. López had no hopes—shall we call them fears?—that the Dian de Burgos would ever again appear to seek him out in his place of exile. He knew how serious and how terrible always were the jokes of his late tyrant, and never looked for his repentance. Nor did the poor Amaya—such was the name of the damsel—dream that her Caribbean kindred would ever sunder a union so marvellously wrought by Heaven. Her barbarous rites were neglected in the prompt realization of her dreams. This was due in great measure to the teachings of the Maroon. Already had he begun to bestow upon her some of his theology—crude and selfish as it was. The *Agnus Dei* which he put into her hands, was quite as frequently an object of her entreaty as it

was of his. Their supplications, at morning and at evening, to the Virgin, were twined together; and it must be confessed that, of the two, the poor pagan damsel was much more earnest in her prayers than the habitual Christian.

He taught her other lessons. Already had he begun to conduct her fingers among the strings of his guitar, and she, rejoicing at the merry tinkle which she produced, soon promised to acquire its language. The instrument was constantly in her keeping, except when she summoned him to perform upon it. Then she sat beside him, on the edge of the great ocean, and while the waters rolled and tumbled toward their feet, she listened to his chant—his fierce ballads of Spanish chivalry—comprehending but little of the story, but feeling all the sweetness of the music, the more perhaps that the words were mysterious and vague.

But their sports were not always of this subdued order, though they were scarcely less romantic—such, at least, as she now taught and encouraged him to practise. The sea was scarcely an object of terror to the practised swimmers of the Caribbean Isles. Amaya, like all the damsels of her people, had been accustomed to embrace its billows from her infancy. She soon taught the more apprehensive López to pursue her in the waves. At the fall of the tide she led him off among the rocks, whose heads at such periods were distinctly visible. Here, resting on their dark gray summits, he beheld her, with a terror in which she did not share, leap down into the boiling black

abysses, and disappear wholly from his sight. Before he had yet recovered from his alarm, she reappeared, bringing up with her the peculiar oyster, whose immedicable wounds give birth to the beautiful pearl which is so much valued, though not in the same degree, by Indian and European. After this discovery, our Maroon encouraged the sport which had first alarmed his fears. He, too, acquired courage from cupidity, and, being no bad swimmer, he learned to follow her into the grim recesses of the rocks, when the seas were at repose. He reserved to himself the opening of the valves, so that he extricated the fruit from their embrace, without subjecting it to injury. Great was the wealth which he thus acquired, to say nothing of the ancient treasures of the cavern.

But these treasures, which he had not sought, were valueless where he was. His possessions, so unsuited to his present condition, first taught him to repine. When he looked upon his unprofitable stores, his thoughts immediately yearned for the native land, in which they had made him famous. With this recollection, his heart saddened within him. He looked earnestly along the ocean waste for some sign of his countrymen. He looked with a momentary indifference upon the sweet, wild, and artless creature, who gambolled before his eyes, or crouched in confidence beside him. Her keen glance beheld these changes. No change in his aspect ever escaped her vigilance. At such moments, she would incline herself timidly toward him—would draw his attention by little arti-

fices—would appeal to him in awkward Castilian, which insensibly glided into her native Caribbean tongue;—the broken accents finally acquiring emphasis as they concluded in some sweet and foreign ditty. Sometimes, with a playful fondness, she would assail his melancholy by sudden plunges into the billows, striking out for the cluster of little rocks; hiding in whose hollows, she would beguile him with a wild strain of her people, or in appealing fancies of her own, which might have found a fitting translation in such a ballad as the following:—

THE LAY OF THE CARIB DAMSEL.

I.

Come, seek the ocean's depths with me,
For there are joys beneath the sea;
Joys, that when all is dark above,
Make all below a home of love!

II.

In hollow bright and fountain clear,
Lo! thousand pearl await us there;
And amber drops that sea-birds weep
In sparry caves along the deep.

III.

A crystal chamber there I know,
Where never yet did sunshaft go;
The soft moss from the rocks, I take,
Of this our nuptial couch to make.

IV.

There, as thou yieldest on my breast,
My songs shall soothe thy happy rest—
Such songs as still our prophets hear,
When winds and stars are singing near.

V.

These tell of climes, whose deep delight
Knows never change from day to night;
Where, if we love, the blooms and flowers,
And fruits—shall evermore be ours.

VI.

Oh! yield thee to the hope I bring;
Believe the truth I feel and sing;
Nor teach thy spirit thus to weep
Thy Christian home beyond the deep.

VII.

'Tis little—ah! too well I know,
The poor Amaya may bestow—
But if a heart that's truly thine,
Be worthy thee, O, cherish mine!

VIII.

My life is in thy look—for thee
I bloom, as for the sun the tree;
My hopes—when thou forget'st thy woes—
Unfold, as flowers when winter goes.

IX.

And though, as our traditions say,
There bloom the worlds of endless day,
I would not care to seek the sky,
If there thy spirit did not fly.

It was impossible even for a heart so selfish as that of our Maroon, wholly to resist a confidence so sweet and touching. The wild grace of her action, the spiritual delicacy of her love, the delightful companionship with which she cheered his solitude—all succeeded, in the absence of any absolute temptations, to secure his continued devotion to her charms.

But a change was destined to cast its shadow over their otherwise happy dreams. Three weeks of de-

light, with little interval and scarcely any respite, had passed since they first knew each other. No doubt of the security, as well as transport, of her condition, assailed the heart of the Indian damsel; and if the Spaniard ever thought of his home, it was only as one of those vexing fancies, which, as he could scarcely hope to realize it, it was but childish to encourage. He made the most of his present happiness, and resigned himself to the possession of Amaya, with the more satisfaction, indeed, since, in a choice among a thousand, she still would most probably have been the object of his preference. But he did not the less regard the dowry which she brought him. He subjected his treasure to daily examination, and, when the weather served, to daily increase. His necessities made him a miser. He did not the less enjoy the treasure, which it seemed he could never spend.

CHAPTER XXI.

But a new prospect of freedom, in this respect, was about to open upon him. One morning, whilst our wealthy Maroon was still engaged in the cleansing and assorting of his treasure, close in his cavern—he was surprised by the sudden and unexpected entrance of Amaya, with words of wonder on her tongue, and looks of terror in her face. He hastily put his pearls from sight, and hurried with her to the

entrance of the cavern. There, in the sea-monster which alarmed her with a nameless fear, he beheld an object of scarcely less terror to himself. This was an European vessel. It might—it must be a Spaniard—but it was still at too great a distance to enable him to solve his doubts, or to relieve or increase his apprehensions. It was evidently approaching his islet; and for what visitor, other than Velasquez, should he look?

In a secure cover, on the top of his cavern, our Maroon, with the trembling Amaya beside him, watched the course of the stranger. The Indian girl beheld the anxiety of her companion—to describe the feeling at his heart, embodied in his looks and actions, by its gentlest name—and her own terrors increased accordingly. In the brief space of time between the first appearance of the vessel, and his discovery of her true character, Lopez de Levya rapidly ran over in his mind the prospects of his condition—the probable object of the Dian de Burgos, and the effect of this return, upon his fortunes. What had he to hope from Velasquez, or the implacable Juan, his rival? What motive, but that of mockery and a cruel curiosity, would have brought either of them back to the spot where they had *marooned* him? And should they search for him, what was his hope of concealment? He could hide from the Caribbeans, who had no suspicion of any presence but their own—but from the people of the Dian de Burgos there was no concealment. They would search the island—they would discover the cavern, and not one of its crevices could

be made safe against their penetrating eyes or their probing lances.

A cold sweat covered the limbs of the miserable creature, as his rapid thoughts coursed over the whole ground of his condition. And yet, it will scarcely be believed that, thus doubtful of his own fate, he could yet think of concealing his newly-gotten treasure. He hurried back into his cave, counselling Amaya still to maintain her watch upon the stranger. In secret, he toiled to place his pearls in security. The crevice which let in the light on one side the vault, he busily crammed with the soft moss and leaves taken from the couch in which he had slept. The light being excluded, he placed his baskets of treasure along the ledge, and concealed them in like manner. Nothing but the closest search, under the stimulating influence of a suspicion that something was concealed, could have led to the discovery of his possessions. There was no way of hiding himself in the same manner; and, full of the most horrible apprehensions, he joined Amaya upon the eminence.

It was now necessary to think of her. Should Velasquez suspect the treasure—should Juan obtain sight of her, or any of the Spaniards—she would be torn from his arms with unscrupulous violence. To conceal her, it was necessary that the cave should be kept from their knowledge. He conducted her into its recesses. He showed her where he himself had been hidden, and easily persuaded her to seek shelter in its dusky recesses. She might hope to escape unnoticed, even if the cave were penetrated; but her safety,

should the bark be the Dian de Burgos, lay only in showing himself. Upon this policy, still trembling to encounter the cruel Velasquez and insidious and hateful Juan, the Maroon resolved. He continued his watch in secrecy, though passing from copse to copse; he left the neighborhood of his cavern, as the chewit flies always from the spot where her young are hidden.

The vessel approached that part of the island where he had been landed. This increased his fears that she was that of his tyrant. If he came to mock, it was the game of Lopez to implore and seem repentant. If to pardon, it was his policy rather to appear surly, and provoke his enemy to continued hostility;—for, though anxious to reach Spain with his treasure, yet our Maroon well knew that, with Juan or Velasquez as a master, the very suspicion of his great possessions would be fatal to his life. Better, then, to delay the day of his restoration, than peril everything on a hope so doubtful. But, in truth, Lopez de Levya was not in a condition of mind to resolve on any policy. He was now, as he had ever been before, the creature of events!

CHAPTER XXII.

These, for once at least, proved favorable to his fortunes. We have already detailed the fearful circumstances which had changed the dynasty on board the Dian de Burgos. Linares and Maria de Pacheco

were now the masters, but the former had no control over the proud intelligent spirit by whom the whole proceeding had been counselled. He was a mere seaman—a bold, strong man—who, conscious of his own deficiencies, was not unwilling to supply them from the stores of one who had so much identified her fortunes with his own. She asked for little in return, and that he was disposed to accord. He was the captain of the ship, but she was the guiding spirit. He did not seek her affections. On this point—indulgent, perhaps, on all others—she had shown herself equally resentful and inflexible. But it will suffice for us that they understood each other, and that Linares lent himself to her project of rescuing Lopez. The latter had but little esteem among the seamen, but he had been harmless, was really gentle in his nature in proportion as he was timid, and his cruel punishment had won their pity and their sympathies. The sailor of that day looked upon the maroon as doomed to a much worse punishment than death!

Impatient on the prow of the Dian de Burgos, stood the proud but anxious woman, as the ship approached the shore. Concealed among a cluster of young palms, Lopez beheld her; and, in the position which she held, her eager attitude and outstretched hand, he at once inferred some great change in her fortunes and his own. His heart was instantly strengthened. He came forth from his hiding-place, and the ship, dropping her anchors, Maria de Pacheco was the first to descend into the boat which now hurried to the shore. We need not attempt to depict her raptures or

his own. In her case, they were those of a strong impetuous nature—her very fondness being linked with an arrogance of will, which rather compelled and commanded, than solicited affection in return. The submissive spirit of the Maroon did not dare to withhold the expression of a joy, and the declaration of an attachment, beyond any which he possibly could feel. Perhaps, of the two persons, there was much more in the gentle and dependent nature of Amaya, to persuade him into love, than in that of the imperious woman whom he had certainly learned to fear. But she brought with her something more than the poor Indian girl could offer. Her coming promised him a restoration to his country, and the privilege of growing famous in the use of his Caribbean treasures. The very dowry of Amaya was hostile to her claims. Of this dowry—of Amaya herself—he religiously forbore to whisper aught to the proud woman who stood beside him, and who naturally spoke and thought as if she were as much the mistress of his heart as she was of his fate. She soon told him all her story, and he revealed such portions of his as might satisfy her inquiries without provoking any doubts. He described the beauties of his islet. He showed her where he had often slept, beneath the palms. He gathered for her his fresh and luscious fruits, and in the delight and wonder with which she beheld this new paradise, and in the happy consciousness of the attainment of all for which she had striven, at such fearful sacrifice of pride and feminine feeling, she yielded herself up to the sweet and innocent attractions which gathered

around her. It was with a vague feeling of terror that he heard her declare her purpose to explore his empire, and to see, for herself, the beautiful retreats and resources which had so singularly fallen to his possession.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The situation of our Maroon was one of considerable difficulty. There was no pretext by which he could avoid the contemplated exploration of his islet by the woman who was the mistress of his fate, and, as she naturally enough assumed, of his affections also. What had she not perilled for those affections? The conviction of her own sacrifices—the belief that she had saved him from a cruel destiny, and that he felt the profoundest gratitude for her love—had rendered her more subdued, and gentle of tone and carriage, than he had ever before seen her. She had no longer to contend with the brutal passions of Velasquez or the subtle and insolent spirit of his nephew. There was no influence now to combat her imperious will, and to oppose itself to the exercise of her own passions. She had won the fearful game for which she had played, and she might well give herself a brief respite after the contest. The sweet and balmy climate of the islet, the picturesque beauty of its aspects —its delicious fruits—the novelty of such an abode —and, above all, that romantic passion for solitude—

with a companion—which accompanies the fresher sensibilities of youth—all tended to excite in Maria de Pacheco the desire which she expressed, at least, to dream away a single night on the lonely domain of the Maroon. Her early career in the haunts of the gypsy, was recalled to memory; and she longed to realize anew, the wild sense of pleasure which her passionate childhood had felt, dreaming beneath the arch of heaven, and gazing away long lapses of the night, in mute communion with the sadly bright, down-looking stars. Here, in a solitude which her lover had maintained for near a month, she might surely rest one night in safety. The boat might return to the ship—nay, *should* return, and she should share, for that night, with Lopez, the sovereignty of the island.

"They shall maroon me also, Lopez."

"They may!" was his suggestion.

"Nay, I fear not. Linares is faithful to me. He cannot well do without me."

"But he may be blown off with a tempest. They are fierce and sudden in these latitudes, and terrible in proportion to the beauty and serenity of the calmness now."

"Well, Linares will come back for us."

"But, should he founder?"

"*We*, then, are safe, Lopez!"

The answer silenced him for awhile. But he renewed the attempt—more cautiously, but with such suggestions as might have influenced his own nature. He described to her the unwonted terrors which had

assailed him in his first acquaintance with the island. The lowing of strange beasts of the sea, which sometimes came to sleep by night upon the shore;—the screams of unknown birds of great expanse of wing and power, glimpses of which he caught, rising and descending, as from the stars, at midnight;—the awful plunges of wild monsters, from the shore into the sea, and the bellowing of whole tribes of strange animals, whose uproar seemed to shake the islet itself. But these rather provoked the curiosity than the alarm of the fearless woman. The novelty of such sights and sounds precluded the images of terror which he sought to raise. She declared the very loneliness which still made him shudder, to be a consciousness highly desirable to her heart; and as for the great birds and beasts—she had seen the elephant, and had heard the lion roar in his own desert of Sahara; and the very safety of her lover was a sufficient proof that she could be in no peril. Her will proved superior to his fears. The boat was filled with fruit, and sent back to the ship, and Linares was entreated to lay his vessel at anchor for the night, when the two would come on board in the morning.

To keep Maria from the cave, was now the object of the Maroon;—to prolong his ramble until nightfall, among the groves, and along the sea-shore—and, in the night, while she slept, to steal away from her side—regain the cave, repossess himself of his treasure, and soothe the fears and the suspicions of Amaya, so that he might abandon her in safety, and without detection by the woman whom he most feared;—this was the

notable scheme which he suddenly devised, when he found that Maria was fixed in her purpose of remaining on the islet. To leave his treasure was out of the question. But for this treasure he had not cared to leave the place. He was really very happy with the Indian damsel—might have been completely happy but for the dowry which she brought, and which filled him with the proudest fancies of the figure that he should make in Spain. To say that he had no compunctious visitings of conscience at the thought of her abused devotion—of his so soon and cruel abandonment of one who so thoroughly confided to his affections—would be to do him great injustice. But the sympathies of the heart, unless sustained and strengthened by a decisive will of the intellect, are never long to be relied on. They are at the mercy of every mind, who brings to its support a resolute and earnest character. Lopez was humbled when he thought of Amaya, but his remedy was to dismiss her from his thoughts with all possible rapidity. He was compelled to do so, for his companion required all his attentions.

We shall say nothing of her shows of fondness. Maria de Pacheco was not feeble or childish—not wanton, indeed—in the display of her attachments. She was too proud for the exhibition of love in its weakness and dependence. But she indulged the mood somewhat after the fashion of the Sultana of the East. She willed to love, and to be loved, and she required obedience. It was necessary that Lopez should prove that he was not ungrateful for the risks which she had run, and the sacrifices which she had

made, in his behalf. It was needful that his attachment should be as fond, and his behavior as dutiful, as it had been before the unfortunate discovery which had placed them both at the mercy of Juan. That he was reluctant, or forgetful in any respect, Maria was not suffered to perceive. Excited as she was by her own emotions—the consciousness of a great battle fought, and a triumph gained—the last trophies of which were now in her hands—she, perhaps, would have been slow to detect the wandering mood and the indifferent manner of her companion, even if he had betrayed either. But the timid nature is always solicitous how it alarms or offends the bold one; and on the score of his devotedness, Maria beheld nothing, as yet, to occasion her jealousy. But his will, which kept him observant of her moods, was not sufficient to prescribe to her the course to be pursued, or to arrest her eager progress. Her impetuous spirit hurried her forward; and the ground which—feeling his way at every step—it had taken Lopez several days to traverse, when he first undertook to explore his territory —was now overcome in a few hours. Vainly did he seek to detain her gaze—to arrest her progress, and inspire in her an admiration of objects which had never once fixed his own. His artifices, though never suspected, were always fruitless. She still made fearful progress. The sea-shore was abandoned, the cool groves received them, the plain rose beneath her footsteps—they were already upon the slopes of that elevation, at the extremity of which lay the secret and the treasure of the Maroon. He looked back in

terror for the sun. His round red orb still shone high and proudly in the heavens; and it was with equal wonder and self-reproach that Lopez remembered how long it was before his timid spirit had suffered him to compass the same extent of territory. The paths naturally opened for her footsteps. They had often been traversed by his own; and it was with a mortal fear that Lopez momently caught glimpses of the small, naked footstep of Amaya, on the softer sands, as she had wandered beside him in their rambles. But these were never seen by Maria de Pacheco. The earnest and intense nature seldom pauses for the small details in progress. Her proud spirit was always upward as well as onward—always above the earth. She threw herself suddenly down beneath the thicket. There was a pause. Our Maroon enjoyed a brief respite from his terrors. He threw himself beside her, and her eyes closed in his embrace. To a fierce and intense nature such as hers, there is something delicious in the pauses of the strife, but it is only because they are momentary. The rest from conquest is perhaps the only real luxury of enthusiasm;—but the interval is brief, and is simply designed to afford a renewal of the vitality necessary for continued action.

"How sweet, how beautiful, is the repose of sky, and shore, and sea! What a delicious languor of atmosphere is this!"—and a moment after speaking thus, Maria de Pacheco shook off her own languor, and was once more upon her feet.

"Will she now return to the shore—to the palms

where I told her I had slept?" Such was the secret inquiry of his heart. She had no such purpose. Her curiosity was still unsatisfied. Besides, to walk simply upon the solid earth, after weeks on shipboard, is itself a luxury. The sun was still high, and bright, though sloping gradually to the sea. The step of Maria was taken forward, and Lopez followed, like a criminal, with reluctant footsteps, as if going to execution. They stood at length on the brow of the hill, which looked over to the Caribbean shore. The abrupt precipice arrested her farther progress, and she stood gazing with eager satisfaction upon the small, snug, and lovely domain of the Maroon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE thoughts coursed rapidly through the brain of Lopez de Levya. He felt that she was on the brink of his secret. Another step to the right or to the left, and the descending pathway would lead to the sandy esplanade at the mouth of the cave; and, with her restless glances, what could keep her from discovering its curious portal, and penetrating to its inmost recesses. Were she to make this discovery without his assistance, her suspicions might well be awakened! He resolved with unaccustomed boldness. He made a merit of necessity. He put his hand upon her arm, and with a sweet significant smile looked upon her face as she gazed upward.

"I have reserved, for the last, my greatest curiosity. I have conducted you hither to surprise you. Follow me now, and you will see how complete is my establishment!"

She did not reflect that he had been guided by her footsteps, and that his reluctance at her inspection of his territories had been declared from the beginning. She was sufficiently happy, and indulged in no recollections or reflections which might occasion doubt or suspicion. He led the way, and she descended to the beach. He conducted her to the cave, and, with the eager delight of a curious child, she darted into its recesses. The antechamber was a wonder, but the interior aroused all that was romantic in her nature. It was just the sort of dwelling for one trained among the gypsies of the Alpuxarras. The chamber was so wild and snug! The stone, such a truly Egyptian fireplace! She did not dream of its uses as an altar, nor did he breathe a syllable on this subject. And the couch in which he had slept, in which there still remained a sufficient supply of moss and leaves, to render it suitable for the same purpose, was one to determine her instantly that it should be hers that very night.

We need not describe the consternation of Lopez as he listened to this resolve. It completed his disquiet and annoyance. He had trembled at every step which she had taken—at every glance of her eye when the cave was entered. He feared her eager survey—her penetrating scrutiny. His eyes stole frequently and unconsciously to the remote corner of the cave in

which he had concealed Amaya; and while he trembled at the possible discoveries of the Spanish woman, his companion, his heart smote him for those which the poor girl of Caribbee must have already made. For Maria de Pacheco, assuming the duty and devotion of her lover, had not spared her endearments. The silence and the secrecy of the cavern seemed to invite them. She had hung upon his neck with her caresses, and he had been compelled to requite them, though in fear and trembling. His conscience smote him when he thought of the unselfish and confiding passion of Amaya—her simple truth, her gentle nature, and the artless sweetness of her affections. But to withstand the imperious spirit of the woman at his side, was not within his strength and courage. His fears, and the new-born agonies of the Indian woman, may be more easily imagined than described.

CHAPTER XXV.

Again did the two emerge from the cavern. The sun had set! Night was falling rapidly, as is its wont in those regions, where the day makes, as it were, but a single transition, from meridian brightness to the stillness and the dusk of midnight. An angry flush lay in the region where the sun went down, to the wary mariner denoting wind and tempest. But neither Lopez nor his companion thought of storm; nor did this fear impress the seamen on board the

Dian de Burgos. The fruits from the shore—the momentary pause from the ordinary duties of the sea—and a division of a portion of the treasures of Velasquez and Juan among the crew, by way of hush-money and bounty, called for something like indulgence. The Dian de Burgos was not without her luxuries. The stores of her late captain were fished up. Linares was disposed to be liberal to his former comrades; and wine and stronger beverages were not denied to their enjoyment. It was among the infirmities of Linares, that he himself was not wholly insensible to the joys of the vine. As the heir of Velasquez, he might certainly indulge his tastes. He did so; and while Maria de Pacheco luxuriated in the delights of love, he gratified his newly-gotten liberty by sacrifices at the altars of a very different deity.

Ordinary precautions are soon forgotten in the acquisition of extraordinary pleasures. No one thought of tempest. The evening remained calm. There was little wind stirring, just enough to break into irregular but not threatening billows the vast surface of the sea. The stars were out soon, large, bright, and very numerous. A thin drift of clouds might be seen to scud slowly away among them from the west to the east. Lopez would have led his companion away from the cavern—would have persuaded her to a couch among the palms, where, as he showed her, his own had first been made. But she had resolved upon the chamber in the cavern, and he was compelled to submit. They re-entered it with heedful footsteps. The interior was wholly dark, except where, in the inner

apartment, the light of the stars made its way through the two small apertures which the Maroon had left unclosed. It was long before they slept. Much had Maria de Pacheco to relate. She gave him the details of the conspiracy against Velasquez. She suppressed nothing of her own share in the proceedings, and declared a very natural and feminine horror at the catastrophe, which she yet insisted on as necessary to her own safety and to his. The Maroon listened to the narrative with conflicting feelings, and in silence. The conduct of Maria established a new claim upon his gratitude; but it did not contribute to the strength of his former passion; and his thoughts, fascinated by the terrible story to which he listened, were sometimes startled from their propriety, as he heard, more than once, what seemed to him a deep sigh from the hiding-place of Amaya. It may have been in his fancy only that this intrusive monitor was heard, but it sufficed to keep him apprehensive. Fortunately, Maria de Pacheco heard nothing. She had no suspicions; and, in the death of Juan and Velasquez, her fears were all ended. In the recovery of the Maroon all her hopes seemed to be satisfied.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The night began to wane—the wind rose. It could be heard shrilly to whistle through the crevices of the rock, as if in threat and warning. But Maria slept

not deeply, and her head was on the arm of the Maroon. When he sought to rise, which more than once he did, she started from her sleep with disquietude. If he but stirred she was conscious of it. Her sleep was troubled. Her dreams revenged upon her conscience the obtuseness which, by the force of her will, she imposed upon it in her waking moments. It enabled her to restrain, though unconsciously, the movements of her companion. He made repeated attempts to disengage himself from her grasp—and rise. He wished to confer with Amaya. We may conjecture what he would have said. But he strove in vain. In watching for the moment when the sleep of Maria should become sufficiently deep to afford him the desired opportunity, he finally slept himself. Nature yielded at last, and his slumbers were soon quite as profound as those of his companion.

Without being well conscious that he slept at all, he was suddenly awakened, as if by a death-cold hand upon his wrist. He started, and was confounded when he unclosed his eyes, to behold the cavern brightly illuminated. The fire which had been suffered to go out by the Caribbean damsel, in the sweet experience of her first mortal passion, had been suddenly revived, and by her hands. She stood between him and the altar-place, her eyes wildly sad and staring upon him and his companion. A torch was still grasped in one of her uplifted hands. She had probably been inspecting closely the sleeping features of the woman who had first taught her to feel the agony which belongs to a consciousness of the infidelity of

the beloved one. As, at his awakening, the head of the Maroon was involuntarily uplifted, she cast the brand which she held upon the altar, flung one of her hands despairingly and reproachfully toward him, and darted headlong from the chamber.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MARIA de Pacheco still slept. It was now doubly important to the Maroon that she should continue to do so. To rise softly—which he now succeeded in doing, without arousing her—to extinguish the brands, and to steal forth and see what was the course and what the purpose of Amaya, was the next natural movement of Lopez. He soon smothered the flame and quenched the burning embers; but the night had grown dark, the stars were shrouded, and, when he emerged from the cavern, he could see nothing. He stole back, trembling with doubt and apprehension, and wondering what next would follow. Maria had awakened.

"Where are you?"—was her salutation as he drew nigh—"Where have you been?"

"Hear you the wind, Maria? The night is very dark and gusty. We shall have a storm to-morrow."

"But we are safe, Lopez!" was the reply.

"I am not so sure of that," was the secret whisper of his guilty heart.

The night passed without farther interruptions. At

dawn, the Maroon arose before his companion. He proceeded to his treasure, which he now prepared to have in readiness to convey, without being suspected, on board the vessel. The richer pearls were hidden in his bosom and in the folds of his garments. The rest were stored away carefully in the bottom of one of the largest baskets which he had found in his cavern, and which he pretended had been picked up on the shore. A few bananas were laid upon the top, to prevent inquiry. His arrangements were all complete before Maria awakened. With the sunrise they had both emerged upon the beach. But the sun rose faintly, and struggled on his course against numerous clouds. The wind came in sudden gusts, sweeping the ocean into temporary anger. The lulls between were not less unpromising; and, to the old seamen, the signs were pregnant of one of those wild and capricious changes of the weather, which so frequently converted into a scene of wrath and horror the otherwise sweet serene of these latitudes. But Maria did not heed these signs, in the consciousness of the attainment of her desires. Lopez was too anxious to leave the neighborhood of the poor Caribbean damsel, about whom his heart constantly reproached itself; and those whom we left on shipboard were quite too happy, in the enjoyment of their unfrequent saturnalia, to disturb themselves with anticipations of the future. It may have been a fancy only, but, looking back at the moment ere he stepped into the boat which was to convey him from the islet, did he catch a glimpse of the slender form of Amaya among the

palms, with her arm outstretched, and pointing to the cavern? A second and more earnest glance revealed him nothing.

Safely within the ship, his treasures made secure, and with the example of all around him persuading him to licentiousness, Lopez de Levya soon gave way to excesses which contributed to make him forgetful of the damsel he had deserted. He was received with half maudlin affection by Linares and the crew. The coarser pleasures in which these were indulging were transferred, with some qualifying refinements, to the cabin of Velasquez. Here, from flagons of gold and silver, did our Maroon quaff the intoxicating beverage to the health of Maria de Pacheco and the prosperous fortunes of the Dian de Burgos. The day passed in prolonged indulgence. The excesses which might have revolted Maria and her companion at another time, were now only the outpourings of a natural exultation, which was due to a sense of newly-acquired freedom, and the acquisition of novel luxuries. The gradual progress of the hours brought on increase of wind which finally grew to storm. But this occasioned no disquiet, and did not lessen the enjoyments of any of the parties. Linares, like a veteran seaman, full of wine as he was, first took care to see that his vessel was secure. He was in a good anchorage. His ship was stripped to the storm, and he had no reason to apprehend that she would drag her anchor under any pressure of the gale. A good watch was set, and, wishing for more freedom in his revels, he withdrew from the cabin to the more genial, if more rough association of the crew.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NIGHT came on—a night of storm and many terrors. Maria de Pacheco and our Maroon were not wholly insensible to its dangers. At moments, when the pressure of the wind was most severely felt, they would pause in the midst of their delights, and think of the solid security of the chamber in the rock. But the revel went on without reserve. The rich flagon stood before them in the cabin. They were alone with each other. They lived for each other, and there was no tyrannic power at hand to arrest them as they carried the intoxicating draught of rapture to their lips. No longer conscious of the proximity of other eyes, Lopez de Levya requited the caresses of his companion with an ardency quite equal to her own. They spoke of their mutual delights. They declared their mutual hopes of home, and, in the increasing exultation which he felt in his security, and the increasing influence of the wine which he had quaffed, the Maroon revealed to Maria the wealth of pearl which was contained in his bosom and his baskets. He poured forth his milk-white but transparent treasures into her lap, and wound the lengthened strands about her neck. His form resting upon one knee before her, her head stooping to his embrace, neither of them perceived, for several moments, that, while they were most drunk with delight, they had a visitor. The door of the cabin had opened silently upon them,

and the deserted damsel of the Caribbees, standing erect, with hands drooping at her side, and eyes staring intently, but vacantly and wildly upon them, now stood, beholding, herself for a while unseen, their almost infantile caresses. Stern and mournful did she stand, surveying this scene of tenderness, which every pulse of her passionate young heart taught her was indulged at her expense. She neither sighed, nor spoke, nor moved, after her first entrance. Was it an instinct of their own souls which taught them that another and a hostile spirit was at hand, and which made the proud Spanish woman start to her feet, with a sudden terror; while the Maroon, sinking lower, upon both knees, looked round him in shame and trepidation at the unexpected presence? To him the deserted woman gave but a single glance, but that declared everything in their mutual histories. Advancing toward Maria de Pacheco, before her purpose could be divined, she suddenly tore the strands of pearl from the bared neck and bosom to which they seemed beautifully kindred, then, dashing them to the floor, trampled them under foot, and fled from the cabin with a shriek which sounded like that of doom in the ears of the Maroon. He had apprehended a worse danger when he saw her so suddenly approach Maria. He had seen in the grasp of the Indian damsel, the same broad and heavy cleaver of stone with which he had beheld the priestess, on the night of her first entrance to the cave, sever the long sable tresses from her neck, and devote them, in sacrifice, on behalf of her future destinies. That she

would use this fearful instrument on the forehead of the Spanish woman, was the spontaneous fear in the heart of Lopez; but, at that moment, so suddenly had he been surprised by her presence, and so greatly was he confounded by his guilt and terror, she might have safely executed the deed of death, had murder been her purpose.

Inflamed with wine, stung by the indignity to which she had been subjected, Maria de Pacheco recovered from her astonishment much sooner than her paramour from his fears. Confronting him with a fierce and flashing glance from her dark imperial eye, she demanded, in choking accents, the explanation of the scene. But, filled with terror, partly intoxicated, and wholly confused and bewildered by the condition in which he found himself, the unmeaning mutterings from his lips gave no satisfaction to the eager and heated inquirer. With a speech full of equal scorn and suspicion, she flung away from his approach, and darted out upon the deck of the vessel in pursuit of the stranger. There, all was storm and darkness. The black masses of night seemed to crowd and accumulate before her path, filling up the passages, and preventing her progress. The vessel pitched awfully. The woman could scarcely keep her feet, though quite as much accustomed to the motion of the ship as any of the seamen. She felt her way along the bulwarks. She saw nothing, heard nothing—nothing but the awful roaring of the winds as they fell upon the waves in the fury of a mortal conflict. She made her way to the prow. The excellent look-out of veteran

seamen whom Linares had provided for the watch was nowhere to be seen. She called to them below, and a couple of drunken sailors scrambled up and tottered toward her. They had seen nothing. She could see nothing. Nothing was to be heard. Yet, more vigilant, more sober, and less passionate faculties might have detected, even while she made her inquiries, certain dull and heavy strokes, which, at pauses in the storm, seemed to rise from the deep, and to run along the cable. Little did Lopez de Levya divine the fatal purpose for which the Caribbean damsel carried with her that hatchet of stone.

Impatient, with a brain full of suspicions, and a heart severed by disappointment, Maria de Pacheco returned to the cabin, leaving the two half drunken sailors in possession of the watch. They might have been, and probably were, famous watchers at all other times. But the liquors of Velasquez had been equally potent and tempting, and they were still provided with a flask of the delicious beverage. They drank and sang together in defiance of the storm. What was the storm to them? The Dian de Burgos was as tight a creature as ever swan the seas, and hard and firm were the sands, in which their anchors found their rest. Besides, since they came on deck, the storm seemed somewhat to have subsided. The seas were not so high. The ship no longer plunged with that peevish and cumbersome motion, like a high-mettled horse under the discipline of a cruel curb, but rose easily and gently with the play of the billows, as if she were smoothly posting, with a fair gale, along

accustomed pathways of the sea. The observations of our watch were of this satisfactory complexion. It never occurred to them as possible that the ship really was in motion—that she no longer opposed the resistance of her mighty bulk to the winds and waters, but obeyed placidly the impulses which their united powers gave. They little dreamed, how much of their consolation was drawn from causes of their greatest danger.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MEANWHILE, in the cabin of the Dian de Burgos, the tempest raged as fiercely as it did without, and entirely excluded the terrors of wind and sea. The ready instincts of Maria de Pacheco had conducted her to much of the secret of her paramour. She now recalled his reluctance to conduct her over the island —the art, which, when on the eve of discovery, had made a merit of necessity, and led her into the recesses of the cavern—the uneasiness which seemed heedless of her endearments—the disquiet which they seemed to occasion—his disappearance at midnight—and the pearl, the treasure, of which he was so unaccountably possessed. The sudden appearance of the Indian damsel revealed the whole secret, and led to conjectures which made the course of the Maroon seem more odious to Maria than it possibly could have been under a frank and honest statement of the facts.

To have made this statement required nothing more than common courage. But this was the very faculty which Lopez wanted most. When his secret was extorted from him, as it finally was, and the whole of its details surrendered, the vexation of the Spanish woman was not so much because of the events, as because of his withholding them. It betrayed a want of confidence in her, and this was proof of deficient sympathy. Upon this sympathy she had staked her life—had perilled all that was feminine in her nature; and the appalling terror, lest she should have perilled all in vain, might well justify the fearful aspect, and the stern and keen reproaches, with which she encountered him.

She was at last pacified. It was her policy to be so. When the heart has made its last investment, it is slow to doubt its own securities. His declarations of attachment, when he had somewhat recovered his confidence, began to reassure her. She yielded to his persuasions—to his blandishments and caresses, rather than to his reasons, or such as he urged in his justification. It was in the midst of these endearments that a voice was heard faintly singing at the cabin entrance—a voice which the Maroon but too painfully remembered. The tones, though faint, were distinct. The song was in the dialect of the Caribbee, and it was one of which a feeble translation has been already given;—a ballad which the poor Amaya had been wont to sing him, when she would beguile him to join her in her sports of ocean. It rehearsed the delights and the treasures of the deep—its cool crystalline chambers, always secure from the shafts of the sun—

its couches of moss and sea-weed—and of the sweet devotion of the sea maid who implored him to her embraces. The pathetic tenderness of her tone—the wild, but pleading earnestness of her plaint—the solemn sweetness and mysterious force of that invocation with which the separate verses were burdened—

"Come, seek the ocean's depths with me!"—

startled the guilty Maroon with a new and nameless terror. He started to his feet, but remained stationary, incapable of motion. But the angry spirit of Maria de Pacheco was aroused once more. She put him aside, and darted to the entrance of the cabin. As she threw it open, a white form flashed upon the darkness. It seemed as if a spirit had shot away from her grasp, and darting high in air, had disappeared in the black waste of sky and sea beyond. A shriek, rather in exultation than grief, was heard amid the roar of wind and water. It was followed by the human scream of Maria. "Madre de Dios! the ship is moving. We are at the mercy of the seas! Ho! there, Lopez!—Linares! Awake! arouse ye—or we perish!"

Her cries were cut short by her terrors. The prow of the ship was lifted—fearfully lifted, as if by some unseen power from below. The water surged awfully beneath, and a terrible roar followed, as if from a herd of wild animals deep in the hollows of the sea.

"What is that, Lopez?—what is this?—whispered the woman to the faint-hearted paramour who had crept beside her. A terrible shock followed—another

and another!—and the whole dreadful danger was apparent in an instant to both. They were among the rocks. The ship had struck—and the ready memory of the Maroon, well conceived the fearful condition in which they stood, borne by the irresistible and treacherous currents upon those silent and terrible masses of rock, where, in moments of the sea's serene, he had so frequently shared in the wild sports of his Caribbean beauty. Well might he remember those rude and sullen masses. Often had he remarked, with a shudder, the dark and fearful abysses which settled, still and gloomy, in their dark mysterious chambers. But he had now no time to recall the periods of their grim repose. Another moment, and the ship, awfully plunging under the constant impulsions of the sea, buried her sharp bow, with a deep groan, in the black and seething waters. The breakers rushed over them with a fall like that of a cataract. For a single instant, the Dian de Burgos hung suspended as it were, upon a pinnacle. Then, even as the still besotted, and only half-awakened sailors, were rushing out on deck, she divided in the middle—one part falling over into the reservoir among the rocks, the other tumbling back upon the seas, to be driven forward, by successive shocks, and in smaller fragments, to a like destiny.

In this fearful moment, María de Pacheco was separated, by the numerous waves, from the side of the Maroon. He heard her voice through the awful roar.

"Where are you, López?—O! let me not lose you

now!" But he could make no answer. He heard no more. Her cries ceased with that single one. He had not strength to cry, for he was struggling himself with the seas, and with another peril. While the fierce currents bore him forward—while the wild billows tore him away from the fragment of wreck which he had grasped spasmodically, in the moment when the ship went to pieces—he was conscious of a sudden plunge beside him—of an arm fondly wrapped about his neck, and of a voice that sung in tones the most mournful and pathetic in his ears, even as he sank, and sinking with him, that fond ballad of the Caribbean damsel. It was a heart-broken chant, which had some exultation in it. The last human words of which the feeble and perfidious Maroon was conscious, were those of the entreating sea-nymph—

"Come, seek the ocean's depths with me!"

MAIZE IN MILK;

A CHRISTMAS STORY OF THE SOUTH.

CHAPTER I.

Kindle the Christmas brand, and then
Till sunset let it burne;
Which quencht, then lay it up agen
Till Christmas next returne:
Part must be kept wherewith to teend
The Christmas log next yeare,
And where 'tis safely kept, the fiend
Can do no mischiefe there.—HERRICK.

THE FULL CORN-CRIB.

TELL me nothing of the crops! Suppose they don't grow—suppose there *is* a failure, and the corn falls short, and the cotton *sheds*, and the army-worm appears and the caterpillar, and there is an early frost, and half the *bolls* never blow! These things will happen! We must look to lose our crops now and then, no matter what we plant. It can't be that we shall have things always as we wish them. We can't be always wise or always fortunate. But we can, if we please, be always good and good-natured, and loving and cheerful, and thankful for what we do get, and for the things in which we are prosperous. There's

no reason because of the drought that our hearts should be dry also. There's no reason because we make short crops that we should be short to our friends, and because the winter comes on sooner than usual that we should be colder than usual to our neighbors —that our charities should freeze up with the weather, and our gratitude fail us because the sunshine fails us. We must only make the hearth-fire brighter; we must only make sunshine for ourselves, and gather our friends about the warming, and make merry within while all is melancholy without; and show to one another how cheerful everything may be, though the tempest blows never so angrily against the shutter. A man may soon learn to make his sunshine wherever and whenever he pleases, and to carry a happy heart under a thin jacket. He must be a man without regard to the seasons. His affections must not alter with the weather. He mustn't blow hot and cold because the wind does so. He must keep his soul firm and his sympathies steadfast, and his charities must be as quick to warm as his anger is quick to cool. His log must be kindled at Christmas, though he may have never another left in his wood-yard. There must be a fire, you know, at Yule, and why shouldn't his hands kindle it as well as another's? The log was cut to burn!

But he is unfortunate, you say. Well, is that any good reason why he shouldn't warm his fingers in a cold season? But then he makes blaze enough to warm a dozen! Exactly so; and this only proves that even the unfortunate man is never so wholly un-

fortunate that he does not possess the happy privilege, under God, of making others happy. There's no waste if, when he sets his log ablaze, he calls in his neighbors to enjoy it. I tell you the log must burn for some one's comfort in the cold, bleak days of December, and it is something of a blessing in the poor man's cup that he is permitted to raise the blaze. But then, say you, it is his last log! Who shall say that? Who shall dare to say that God's charity must have a limit?—that this man, who knew so well how to warm his hearth for the blessing of his neighbors, shall be permitted to make no more pleasant fires? I tell you, short-sighted mortal, that, even beside that last log, you may yet see some celestial visitant in fustian habit. It is thus that an unquestioning hospitality is sometimes permitted to entertain an angel! With the smoke of that last log, around which the unlucky man, obedient to a custom which he learned in his better days, has gathered in his humble neighbors, there goes up to heaven a rare incense which makes acceptable, and may make profitable also, that last sacrifice of wealth. Let the log burn, then! Wouldst thou throw water on the cheerful gleams which light up all these ruddy faces? Wouldst thou silence the merry crackling of that flaming pile? Wouldst thou put out those pleasant charities which thus, if only once a year, are kindled to make one's fellow warm? Out upon thee, for a doubter of God's providence! Get thee to thy own home, and put thy only stick upon the fire, and call in him who passes, that thou mayest not selfishly and sadly sit alone to see it burn! Then

will the Father of those who gladden at the blaze, so gladden thee as that thou shalt never lack thy log at Yule.

Now, if thou wilt believe me, brother, there is a purpose in this long preamble. Just such was the tenor of that shrill but lively *crow* which issued from the capacious lungs of that famous old cock of St. Matthews, who held in fee the extensive domains of "Maize-in-milk."* The master of "Maize-in-milk" was a sovereign in his way, whose power was known only by its bounty. His was one of the finest plantations for peas, potatoes, Indian corn, and short cottons, in Carolina—not a very great one, it is true; not so large nor so thickly settled as an hundred others in the same and other districts, but just such a snug, productive interest as enabled the proprietor to do the handsome thing by his neighbor, and to entertain his guest like a gentleman. Colonel Openheart was one of those generous and frank planters whom men smiled to name, with pleasant recollections of the warmest welcome and the finest cheer. And even now, with his feathers somewhat ruffled by resistance and unexpected provocation, it was delightful to behold the bland visage and the good-humored smile which took all anger from his aspect. Anger, indeed! It was rare enough to see him angry. We tell you, he was only ruffled, not roused, and just enough touched by opposition, to show how animated he could become even in his benevolence. There he sits at the ample

* Indian corn not yet ripe, but ready in the *ear* for the table.

fireside, in which great logs of oak and hickory are yielding themselves up in flake and flash, and hiss and sparkle, his face glowing like the fire, warm, bright, capacious; cheeks smooth as a woman's, a beard carefully kept down by a persuasive razor, and his flowing locks just beginning to whiten at the ends, and slightly showing their snows against the warmer colors of his neck and cheek. And how his great blue eyes dilate under the high, broad forehead, as he looks around him with a mixed expression of amazement and satisfaction, taking in at the same glance the gentle and matron-like lady who presides at the evening board, from around which the chairs have already been withdrawn; and the tall and graceful damsel of fifteen, who, standing at her side, plies deftly the snow-white napkin over the dripping teacup. I am not sure that the comprehensive glance of Colonel Openheart fails to notice the nice little juvenile episode which escapes the eyes of the ladies, and which presents itself upon the great and antique sofa gracing the opposite end of the apartment. There, but scarcely enough in the foreground to constitute a portion of the picture, you may see Tom Openheart, a stout lad of nine or ten years, exhausted by a long day's squrrel hunt, with his own rifle and on his own pony, drowsing into gradual obliviousness of life and all its excitements, his arms thrown above his head, one of his legs secure on the sofa with his trunk, while the other wanders off, quietly conducting to a neighboring chair, to the leg of which Dick Openheart, a mischievous urchin of seven or eight, busily fastens it by the aid of his sis-

ter's handkerchief. The father's and mother's have already been disposed of in making secure the other equally pliant members of Tom Openheart; and anon, when the fastenings are all complete, you may look for some cunning explosion by which the Gulliver will be made to start from his slumbers in terror, only to be taught the strangeness of his captivity.

I will not pretend to say that our excellent colonel sees this episode. The pleasant twinkle which lights the corner of his eye, and which is somewhat at variance with the words of his mouth, may be due to other influences; but it must be admitted, for the sake of history, that even were he to see the practice of Dick in this transaction, it is still not unlikely that he would suffer it to pass unchallenged. The good man would ascribe it to the season—to a natural levity—to any but a heinous and evil nature, which called for rebuke and punishment. He had a queer notion that children were—only children, and that play was as necessary to their hearts, their growth, nay, their morals, as birch, logic, and religion—doctrines which, in this era of juvenile progress, cannot be supposed likely to diffuse themselves greatly, and of which we venture, therefore, to speak without emotion. It is probable that Colonel Openheart's attention was wholly given to his good lady and his lovely daughter. They at least were his only listeners. There was an air of sadness upon the features of the excellent matron, which, however, were not wholly unlighted by a smile; while, on the other hand, the lips of the damsel were parted with an undisguised

expression of merriment—positively on the verge of open laughter—the pearls of her mouth showing the white tips through their crimson setting, with a good-humor and an arch delight that were clearly quite irresistible. Very sweet and very pretty was this expression of the face of Bessy Openheart, and the jade knew it. She was a blonde, and with features of wondrous regularity. Full of life and vivacity, there was yet a rich fountain of gushing waters at her heart, and her large blue eyes had learned how to fill with tears even before the happy smile could make its escape from her pretty little mouth. But we must not speak of her too soon. She is a mere child as yet—scarcely fifteen—just at that age when girlhood begins to falter with its own gaze, and when we begin to look upon it with as much trepidation as delight. But Colonel Openheart is about to resume.

"Not keep Christmas, Mrs. Openheart—not keep Christmas? Why, what in the world should I do with myself, my dear, or with you, or Bessy there, or Tom, Dick, Harry, and the rest, from Christmas eve till New Year's? And what should we do with the neighbors—with Whitfield, and Jones, and Whipple, and Bond, and poor old Kinsale, and all their wives and little ones, all of whom have spent Christmas and New Year's with us for the last hundred years or more. Some of them certainly did with my grandfather. Old Kinsale can tell you of the first dinner he ever took on this estate in the time of Grandfather Openheart, and that was a Christmas dinner. He can tell you every dish upon the table. There were

ham and turkey just as now—there was roast and boiled—there was a round of beef—there were sausages and pillau—there were sundry pairs of ducks, cabbage and turnips, and potatoes; and for dessert, nuts, apples, mince-pies, plum-puddings, and more preserves than you could shake a stick at. More than thirty persons sat down to table; and to speak of the old man's Madeira, brings tears of pleasure into the eyes of Daddy Kinsale to this moment. I tell you, old Billy Openheart is venerated to this day on account of his Christmas cheer. Not keep Christmas! Why, how would you avoid it, I'd like to know? They'd be here, all of them, fresh and fasting, I may say, before you could roll the Christmas log behind the dogs, and dress up your windows with the holly and cacina. They'd be here to help you, as they have been for the last fifty years. Bond and Whipple always came early for that purpose, and I think I have heard you say that little Susan Bond was the cleverest little creature in the world at dressing up the windows, and glasses, and flower-pots, with the green leaves and the scarlet-berries. To think of the windows of "Maize-in-milk" looking bare at Christmas! Think of "Maize-in-milk" having no visitors at Christmas—no fun, no frolic, no dancing, no—! By the pipers, Mrs. Openheart, I don't know how to understand you. Talk of not keeping Christmas! Why, what in the name of blazes would you do with me, with yourself, with Bessy, Clinton there, and dear little Rose, and Tom, and Dick, and

Harry, and the rest, from Christmas eve till New Year's?"

"Well, to say the truth, dear husband, I did not think of spending Christmas at home at all, this season."

"Not spend Christmas at home!" cried the colonel, with renewed amazement. "And where, in Heaven's name, would you think to spend it?"

"Why, down in the parishes with Uncle Thomas. He's often asked us, you know—"

"With Uncle Thomas in the parishes! Go from home to spend Christmas! After that, I should not be astonished at any of your notions. But, pray, Mrs. Openheart, when did you know your Uncle Thomas to spend *his* Christmas away from home?"

There was a pause, when the good dame, finding that her husband really waited her answer, meekly admitted that such an event had certainly never taken place within her remembrance.

"No—no! You may well say that. Well, only go to *him* and talk of spending Christmas away from home. Try *him*, Mrs. Openheart, by an affectionate invitation to come and stay with *us* Christmas week, and you'll get an answer that will astonish you. You will certainly astonish him by the invitation. No—no; he's too much a gentleman of the old school—one of the good old Carolina stock, who knows what his duties are at Christmas—who knows what is due to his neighbors and to hospitality, and who knows—"

"But, my dear, considering what our expenses are,

and how greatly they have been increased of late, Edward in Europe, and the sending of John and William to college—the purchase of the old Salem tract —the—"

"Poh! poh! poh! Positively, Emily, I am ashamed of you. This is only too ridiculous. You are for letting in at the spigot and letting out at the bung. As for the Salem tract, it needs but one good crop, at good prices, and I pay for that; and that I should give up the acquaintance of my old neighbors, Tom Whipple, Elias Bond, and Daddy Kinsale, because my eldest son is frolicking on the continent, and two others have just had an introduction to those graybeards, Cicero and Homer—"

"Now, husband, you know I don't mean that you should give up the acquaintance of anybody—"

"You do, Emily, if you mean anything. It would amount to the same thing. Not to have my house full of my old friends, as usual at Christmas, would be such a strangeness as would make them all feel strange. They'd look upon me as a broken man, or as a changed one, and in either case they'd become changed also; and then, in place of the cheerful household and pleasant neighborhood that we have had all along, there would be doubt, and coldness, and restraint—and all for what? Really, Emily, I can't see what you'd be driving at."

"But you could still see your neighbors."

"Not as before, Emily. A people so sparsely settled as our own, so very unsophisticated, and with that fierce sort of pride which distinguishes a life of

comparative seclusion, are very easily made suspicious. They are, in particular, exceedingly jealous of any eccentricities on the part of the wealthy. Change your habit toward them in any respect—let your demeanor change in however slight degree, and they resent it as a something sinister, which is always personal to themselves. It wouldn't do to go out and see them at the fence; I must ask them in—and once in, the horse must be put up. And I can't say, 'Well, Bond' —or Whipple, or Jones, or Daddy Kinsale, as the case may be—' very glad to see you always, but sorry I can offer you nothing. Truth is, times are very hard, and that lark of mine in Europe, and those two dogs, Jack and Will, they cost me a pretty penny nowadays. Have to haul in my horns, lest the sheriff pulls them off.' "

"Now, husband, you know I allude to nothing of this sort. It's only the usual waste that I'd have you avoid until you've got out of debt."

"Debt! Why, Mrs. Openheart, you speak as if I were over head and ears! What do I owe, that I can't pay off with a single good crop?"

"You said the same thing last year."

The brave colonel seemed to wince at this suggestion.

"And as for waste—what waste? Do I waste anything at Christmas, or any other time? Is not all consumed that we cook? Is anything thrown away? Are there not mouths for all? What we and our guests do not consume, does it not go to the negroes? What they don't want, does it not go to the dogs and

hogs, and ducks and chickens? I never see anything wasted. Really, Mrs. Openheart, I can't understand you. If you mean anything, it is that we are to kill no beef at Christmas, have no sausages, drink no egg-nog, and, I suppose, for the first time since we've been married, now going on fifty years —"

"Oh, husband—fifty years!"

"Yes, fifty years, more or less."

"Less by half—only twenty-six last November."

"Is it possible! And I said sixty! Well, it's certain I've counted the years by their pleasures."

A sweet, comical smile went round the circle. He continued: "Well, as I was saying, here then, for the first time since our marriage, some forty-two years, as you yourself admit, we are to have no mince-pies—"

"Nay, my dear; I didn't mean that we were to go without *them*. As you have bought the raisins, the citron, and the currants, and as the hogs are already killed—"

"Oh! your only anxiety, then, is to keep these things from being wasted; but if that was your prudent intention, what do you propose to do with these nice things, after you have made them up, if we are to spend our Christmas with your Uncle Thomas?"

"Why, I thought of taking them down with us."

"Indeed! and precious little would Uncle Thomas, in his abundance, thank you for your pies. But, pray, in what respect should we be more wasteful in consuming them at home here, among our own poor neighbors, than down in the parishes, with the rich

ones of Uncle Thomas? Really, Emily, I thought you were a better reasoner."

"Well, Edward, you do, indeed, make out a case against me, and if the mince-pies were the whole of our consumption in staying at home, as they will be in going down to the parishes, then your reproach would be conclusive; but you know, Edward, that these would form but a small part of our expense. They would not be alone; your Madeira, and Sherry, and Champagne—your beeves, your hogs, your turkies, and the horses of a dozen idle and worthless people eating at your corn-crib, and that not the fullest in the world—"

"It is full, Emily;—but I must stop you before you go too far. We can't always say who are the worthless in this world. I am sometimes disposed to think that the most worthless have their uses, and to suspect that the most worthy are not always of the value we put upon them. When I recollect how little I do myself in the way of work, and of how little real service I am to myself or to anybody else, in comparison with what I might be, I feel as if some malicious devil was jerking at my elbow in mockery, at those moments when I suffer myself to talk of the little worth or value of my neighbors. I tell you, Emily, I can't any longer bring myself to feel contempt for any human being, though I may sicken at the viciousness of some, and sorrow over the idleness of others."

"Now, really, Edward, you shall not speak so slightingly of yourself. Are you not always busy? Do you not manage your own plantation?"

"After a fashion; but I'm not sure that my management is at all creditable to me, or serviceable to my interests."

"*You* are never idle."

"I make chips enough, I grant you; but I am not sure that I am always profitably busy."

"Your negroes improve, increase, become more honest, sober, industrious, happy, more human every year."

"Thank God, I can conscientiously believe all that."

"They love you, thank you, and go cheerfully to their tasks."

"Ay, ay; so they do, and so far—But what is that fellow about? As usual, busy in tormenting his brother. Ho there, you dog; get you to bed, and wake up Tom, that he may go along with you! What are you doing with the boy?"

"Only you call him up, papa," was the sly response of the dutiful urchin.

"Call him up yourself—push him—rout him up."

The boy stooped over the elder brother, and, with a closer eye, the worthy sire might have seen with what delicate consideration he introduced a feather of broom-straw into the ears and nostrils of the sleeper. A scream followed, then a roar and scuffle. The leg of Tom, as he started from his slumbers, was found to be inextricably involved with that of the chair, and both went over with a clatter that startled the good mother in her chair, and shook the whole house from its propriety.

"Why, what have you done?"

The victim was not yet sufficiently awake to know well what was the matter with him, but struggled to throw out his fettered hands as in the act of swimming. The father saw his predicament, and as he and Bessy Clinton stooped to undo the ties with which the mischievous boy had fettered the lad, the urchin clapped his hands in exultation, and flew away to the door.

"To bed, sirrah!" said Colonel Openheart, with a voice in which authority struggled hard with merriment; "to bed, before I give you the strap."

"No, no, papa! Don't I know it's Christmas time—and what's the use of Christmas if there's to be no fun, I want to know?"

"The boy has the right on't. What's the use of Christmas if there's to be no fun? There shall be fun, sirrah, but your share of it must cease for the night. To bed, both of you."

"But to-morrow, papa!" said both of the boys in a breath.

"You shall have the ponies, and we'll go to the river; and we'll take the dogs, and see if we can't put up a wild-cat. There, enough for the night."

And the boys were kissed and disappeared.

"And these are to lose their Christmas—and the neighbors, and the negroes, and all, for no better reason than to save the waste, as if there could be any waste in making so many persons happy. And you, Bessy Clinton, that you should side with your

mother for having Christmas away from home. You deserve a whipping for it Bess."

"Ah, papa, you never whipped me yet."

"It's not too late to begin!" and he took the damsel about the waist, and she turned in his embrace and lifted her lips to his own, and he kissed her with delight as he said: "Well, well, we'll put it off till the New Year. I haven't the heart for whipping just now. But then—"

"But Bessy Clinton did not join with me, husband. She was quite opposed to it."

"Ah, that alters the case. You shall have Christmas at home. And Bessy Clinton, for your reward, hear farther—"

"What, papa?"

"You shall have your old friend, Mary Butler, to spend it with you."

"Oh! will she come, papa? Can you get her?"

"Ay, will she. And more than that, mamma, I've bought in all the Butler negroes—bought them in for her benefit, to save them from that shark of a lawyer who manages the estate."

"Surely, Mr. Openheart, you haven't made such a purchase?" anxiously inquired the mother.

"Ay, but I have."

"What! bought in all the negroes?"

"All but a single family. Thirty-five workers, seventy-one negroes in all—and gave a pretty good price for them, too."

"How much?" asked the matron, with increasing concern.

"Two hundred and sixty dollars round."

"Good heavens! And how are you to pay for them?"

"I have three years to pay it in, Emily—first instalment next December of five thousand dollars, and the balance in equal parts the next two years. The terms are quite easy."

"But how are you to pay it, husband?"

"How? Why, surely, you don't suppose that I shan't make a sufficient crop next season to pay five thousand dollars!"

"Have you done so this?"

"No! Why do you ask, when you know that this crop is a failure?"

"Ah—should the next be so?"

"'Pon my honor, Mrs. Openheart, you do contrive to suggest the prettiest prospects."

"But why did you buy these negroes, Mr. Openheart? You have more than you want already, and more than are profitable."

"True bill, Emily."

"You have scarcely any open land more than your present force can work."

"Go to clearing on the first of January. Plenty to clear, thank God."

"But that is fatal to your woodland; and really, Mr. Openheart, the question comes up again—why did you buy a property which you don't want, and which you know to be so unprofitable? Besides, the Butler negroes are particularly unserviceable. I don't know where you will find so many gray-headed people.

Some of them haven't, to my knowledge, done a stitch of work for ten years; and there's at least a dozen old negroes, who can barely totter along with the palsy."

"To tell you the truth, Emily, it was these very old negroes that caused me to buy—these, and the dear child, Mary Butler, who sat weeping in the house as the sale was going on, with these infirm old people hanging about her. They had dandled the child on their knee, and there wasn't one of them, from Daddy Enoch to Maum Betty, the one-eyed, whom she didn't regard as a personal relation. They wept and pleaded with her, and her weeping was so much pleading with me. Besides, I found that Skinflint, the man who acts as lawyer for Ingelhart and Cripps, the executors, was disposed to buy them at his own prices, and nobody would bid against him. Indeed, there was nobody willing to buy property just at this season—you will say they were wiser than your husband. Perhaps so. But they would have gone to Skinflint for nothing. His first bid was a hundred all round, and I at once doubled it. I was indignant at the fellow's bid, and wasn't to be deceived by the whisper that went about, intended to discourage others, that he was bidding in for the heiress. I knew better, and when he found I was in earnest, he run upon me."

"But why did you let him do it? Why not stop at the two hundred?"

"Ask a man when his blood's up why he isn't cool. I was a fool—I know it, Emily, and you may re-

proach me as you will for it. I knew no more what I was about than if I had lost my wits. The sight of the dear, sweet little orphan in her sorrows, totally unmanned me. I had always seen her so happy and so bright before—and I could not help remembering what a pet she was of the dear angel mother. And poor Ben Butler was such a sterling fellow. Nobody wanted a dollar if he had it. I thought of all these things in a moment. I fancied I heard the father whispering in my ears, and that I saw the mother pleading with all her eyes, and my own grew to be quite blinded by my tears. And, then, old Enoch tottered to me in the piazza, staff in hand, and his gray beard hanging on his chest, and his old eyes, half shut up by age, were dripping too; and, taking my arm, he said to me, 'Mauss Openheart, you surely ain't gwine to let us go off to strange people?'—only these words, and they finished my struggles. Just then, Skinflint said one hundred round, and I mounted him with another. I knew his game, the moment I heard his voice. And when he said to me, 'Really, Mr. Openheart, I had no idea that you wished to increase your force,' I swore in my own mind that he at least shouldn't have them. You've heard the whole story. The negroes are to be here to-morrow, and Mary Butler, and Skinflint himself, who is to bring the bonds and bill of sale."

"Well, Edward, I only hope that you may not suffer by your benevolence."

"Nay, never fear, Emily. I'm rash and headstrong, I know, and have done many foolish things;

but I feel sure that I shan't suffer for this helping of the orphan, and keeping these poor dependent creatures from being scattered over the face of the earth. The probability is that my bonds will scarcely be presented for payment so long as the interest is regularly paid. The executors, Ingelhart and Cripps, can make no better investment of the money, and it will be a very nice sum for her when she is of age—or I am prepared to let her have the negroes back if she prefers it then. The plantation was not sold."

"And what will you do with these old negroes, Edward?"

The answer was somewhat impatiently spoken.

"Feed them first, Emily; clothe them, give them Christmas. We'll kill a beef for them to-morrow to begin with, and pray God to-night for good times, that we may be enabled to feed them always, from Christmas to Christmas, as well as now. So now to bed, and see that you rise before the sun, Bessy Clinton. You have to see to the pies and pastries. It's now one week to Christmas, and"—looking out from the windows—"a bright starlight night, in the language of the watchman. May we wake to a bright, dry, and honest winter morning!"

CHAPTER II.

So now is come our joyfulest feast,
Let every man be jolly;
Each room with ivy leaves be drest,
And every post with holly.
Though some churls at our mirth repine,
Round your foreheads garlands twine;
Drown sorrow in a cup of wine,
And down with melancholy.
Slightly altered from George Wither, 1622.

THE day of Christmas eve dawned propitiously upon the broad fields and groves of "Maize-in-milk." There never had been, in all the South, a brighter or sweeter December sunshine. Nature seemed to have yielded herself wholly to the moral of the season. She had put on her gayest habiliments; the earth sent up a perfume less penetrating and diffusive, perhaps, but not less sweet and persuasive than in the spring time, and the woods wore such robes as autumn had bestowed upon them—glorious, rich investitures of crimson and yellow, which made gum, oak, and poplar look each like a sovereign prince begirt by his obsequious courtiers. Christmas in Carolina is very apt to be vexed with storm and rain, a fatal conjunction for thousands of schemes of juvenile delight and delinquency. But the present promises to be quite as favorable to the plans of happy-hearted creatures as the most amiable and philanthropic spirits could pray for; and, with the dawn, the three sons of Colonel Openheart, Tom, the good-fellow, Dick, the mischievous, and Harry, the little, starting from a sleep

which teemed with the most happy dreams of turbulent enjoyment, had darted into the chamber of their excellent sire, and were hauling him out of sleep and bed at the same moment. He, too, had been in the enjoyment of the happiest heart fancies, such as are natural to the fond and hopeful parent. In his sleeping visions, he had beheld the return of his son, Edward, now travelling in Europe, a tall and handsome youth, refined by foreign observation, and with a mind generously expanded to the appreciation of all that was excellent and noble in foreign standards. William and John were also returned from college, availing themselves of the brief respite of a single week accorded them during the great religious holiday of the year. And other forms, almost equally dear, and other images quite as sweet and persuasive, had passed beneath his waking fancy, while his real and earthly nature slept. Sweet glimpses of dear Mary Butler, and his own fair daughter, Bessy Clinton, and vague and indistinct forms and aspects, in innocent relationship with these, all of which aroused the fondest hopes and the most grateful imaginings in the fond father's bosom. It was the season when all sights and sounds are sweet and wholesome to the heart which desires and exercises itself in wholesome influences—when, as the great bard expresses it—

> "*The* bird of dawning singeth all night long:
> And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
> The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
> No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
> So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

And merrily, indeed, and with most vigorous throat, did the hundred voices of Mrs. Openheart's poultry yard respond to each other through the watches of that calm December night. Nor were these the only voices whose music somehow melted in with and formed a part of the dreams of the excellent colonel. All around the fine old mansion-house of "Maize-in-Milk," the mock-birds had made homes for their young among the ancestral oaks and cedars. Of these, the bold choristers had maintained immemorial possession; and, as some of the trees spread their great limbs even up to the windows of the dwelling, against the panes of which their leaves rattled in the gusty night, it was easy for the Puck of the southern groves to send his capricious music through every chamber. These had Colonel Openheart been long accustomed to hear, but it seemed as if, at the approach of the season when

> "a chyld was i-born,
> Us for to savyn that al was forlorn,"

the voices of the birds grew more full and numerous, and a generous and glad spirit, a soul of exultation, gave new impulse to their merriment and music. Their fitful and capricious strains formed fitting echoes to the fancies that swarmed in the good man's visions; and his own heart caught up their echoes, and even while his boys were breaking into his chamber with their clamorous exhortations, he might have been heard to murmur in his sleep broken fragments of one of the ancient English carols—

"Now thrice welcome Christmas
Which brings us good cheer,
Minced-pies and plum-porridge,
Good ale and strong beer," &c.

And this was the boys' welcome as they bounced into the chamber, and dispelled, with a single shout, all the visions of his sleep.

"Why, what a mischief, boys, is the matter, that you rout me up at midnight.

"Midnight, father—why, the sun's a-rising!"

"Well, what then? Is that any good reason that the father shouldn't sleep? You don't know what fine dreams you may have driven away by your uproar."

"Oh, this is no time for dreaming, father. Come, up with you, and let's go to the river, and shoot off the big cannon."

"Well, I suppose there's no resisting you," said the indulgent sire, as he prepared to obey the requisition.

"You will ruin those boys, Colonel Openheart," murmured his excellent help-meet, with some querulousness of accent, occasioned by the rude disturbance of a slumber which had been as precious full of dreams in her case as in that of her husband.

"Nay, never fear," was the reply; "the boys are not so easily spoiled. The danger is with the girls. Boys are naturally good—a little more boisterous than their sisters, but better on the whole. You women are always apt to confound honest impulse with misdoing. We must let them play. Childhood is the

season for play, and play is necessary for the heart; and so, boys, let's go to play heartily, as others go to work. Now that you have roused me, get you gone till I get up and dress myself. I shan't stay long."

In a moment, their merry voices might have been heard upon the lawn in front, ringing clearly out in the dry sweet atmosphere. A gentler song suddenly took wing in an adjoining chamber, and the eyes of father and mother both twinkled with the lustre that came directly from the heart, as they heard the soft but melodious accents of Bessy Clinton, singing, as if in preparation for the coming day, a familiar old Christmas ballad.

"When in Bethl'em fair citie,
Chryst was born to die for me,
Then the angels sang with glee,
In Excelsis gloria.

"Ah! with what a lovely bright,
To the herdsmen shone the light,
Where he lay in lowly plight,
In Excelsis gloria.

"Heavenly king, to save his kind,
Bear we still his birth in mind,
Singing ever as we find,
In Excelsis gloria.

"Praying, as we sing, for grace,
To behold, in bliss, his face,
Whose dear coming saved his race,
In Excelsis gloria."

"And you think boys better than girls—naturally good, husband—not so easily spoiled?" was the quiet but ironical inquiry of the wife, as the last murmurs

of the girl's song subsided away, and were followed by a triumphant shout from below, and a tremendous explosion from a huge blunderbuss, to discharge which they had not waited for the father.

"The rogues!" exclaimed Colonel Openheart. "But I did the very same thing myself when I was a lad—the very same thing—nay, something worse. I made a mine of a whole canister of powder, and nearly shook down the old house on Briar Hill with a single blast. That's the nature of the animal. Don't let it worry you, my dear Emily; they shoot and shout while Bessy Clinton smiles and sings, and I am content that they should both enjoy themselves in their different ways. But the rogues are impatient; hear how they clamor! Emily, dear wife, a kiss! God has blessed us in our children—eight living out of thirteen, five already blessed, and the others blessing us! We have not lived in vain, dear wife? And, hark you, is that Bessy Clinton again? No; it's dear little Rose. She has awakened at last, and sounds her little pipes in song also. How like her voice to Bessy Clinton's, and how like both to your own! But the horses are at the door, and those rogues are ten times as noisy as ever. And you don't like their singing, Emily, so much as Bessy Clinton's, eh?"

"Surely not. How can you ask?"

"Nor I—nor I," said the good-natured father, as he hurried below, leaving the now thoroughly awakened mother to the embraces of the two girls, who entered from an inner chamber, bearing in their hands great

bunches of holly, pranked gayly with their own and the red berries of the cassina.

"You are late this morning, dear mother," said Bessy Clinton with a kiss; and little Rose echoed the opinion and followed the example.

"Late? You are as impatient as Dick and Harry," said the mother. "I am sure it's an hour sooner than you rise usually."

"Ah! but it's Christmas eve, mother, and we have to do a great deal. We shall have them here, pretty soon, and must get an early breakfast. Good old Mr. Bond will be here betimes to help us, and Squire Whipple won't be long after him."

"And Susan Bond's a-coming too, mamma, and Sally," was the eager assurance of little Rose, anxious to put in.

"You are all too like your father, too impatient, children. But now that you are here, Bessy Clinton, make yourself useful. Put the pin in this tippet, and —ah! child, how you're sticking me!"

"I'm so sorry, mother!"

"You're always so impatient! There, that will do. Pick up your holly branches and your berries; such a litter as you make. And come, we will hurry down and see about breakfast, so that it be in readiness when your father comes back. By this time he's half way to the river."

And they descended the stairs. Bessy Clinton singing pleasantly, while her fingers wove the green bushes and the red berries artfully together, from another of the ancient carols with which the English

tastes of an affectionate grandsire had long since made her familiar.

"I am here, the Lord Chrystmasse,
Give me welcome, youth and lasse,
For I come to heal trespasse,
Hurtes of soule to heale;
Dieu gardez—this I bring,
And ye need, with welcoming,
To rejoyce the man I sing,
Come for sinners' weale.

"'Tis Chryste's coming that ye see,
He who died upon the tree,
That your souls, from sin set free,
Might be his once more;
In his blessings, make your cheere,
Yet of evyl joys beware;
Satan spreads his fatal snare,
Though his sway be o'er;

"Welcome me, the Lord Chrystmasse—"

Etcetera! The song was hushed in the sound of carriage wheels. The neighbors had already begun to make their appearance. Sure enough, there was good old Mr. Bond in his homely "Jersey," and Susan Bond in her nice white dimity and old-fashioned tippet, and little Sally, to the delight of Rose, in her faded calico, that sat upon her rounded limbs like the sack upon her great-grandmother; and they brought along with them bouncing Joe Dillon, a great chubby-cheeked lad of one of the farther neighbors, of whom the family at "Maize-in-Milk" as yet knew nothing. And such a tumbling out of the frail vehicle as followed, and such a tumbling out of the house to receive

them as took place, is quite beyond description. Mrs. Openheart met old Mr. Bond on the threshold, and Bessy Clinton took charge of Susan, while little Rose led off Sally—the little also—followed by the chubby boy at halting paces. And between Bessy Clinton and Susan Bond, the work of the day began almost instantly. The myrtle and the holly, the cassina and the bamboo were instantly in requisition, and over the great heavy windows and doors, and all about the huge mirrors and antique family pictures, you could see the arches, and the wreaths, and festoons beginning to grow up in green and crimson, giving to the spacious walls and rooms a charming aspect of the English Gothic. How sweet is work when our tastes go with the toil, and when beauty compensates industry. Our happy maidens were conscious of this pleasure in the progress of the labors of their hands; and now they put up and pulled down, rearranged and altered, their tastes becoming more and more critical the more they were exercised. And "there now, Susan, that will so please father," declared at length that Bessy Clinton was herself quite satisfied.

Leaving the girls thus happily engaged, let us follow the boys in their excursion to the river. You should have seen the lads mount each on his pony not excepting Harry the little, who did not seem a bit too little for the marshtacky, brought all the way from Pocotaligo, which he straddled like an infant centaur. Colonel Openheart, mounted on a strong, black parade horse, upon which he had more than once marshalled his regiment, led the way, Tom trying hard to

keep beside him in the narrow road, and Dick more ambitiously darting half the time ahead. They were followed by Swift, Sure, and Slow, three famous dogs, which were the admiration of all the hunters of St. Matthews. Then came Bedford, the Superlative, a stout, gray-headed negro, who officiated as high-sheriff over the plantation, carried out the wishes of his master, and reported progress nightly; a shrewd sensible negro, cool and steady, confident in his opinions, yet perfectly respectful, who served God and his master as well as he knew how, and, murdering the king's English, seldom committed any more heinous offences. The way of the cavalcade lay over hill and dale, gentle eminences and pleasant slopes, and chiefly through woods which were as old as the hills themselves. Colonel Openheart was fond of trees and foliage, and had so contrived his fields as to maintain a fine body of wood between each. Through these his several roads meandered, and he could pass to the survey of one field after another without once leaving the shelter of the original forests. These were of pine, or oak and hickory, interspersed with a pleasant variety of gum and poplar, and shrub trees of every sort. Long reaches of swamp occasionally relieved the uniform aspects of the hill foliage, by the gigantic forms of cypress, ash, and other trees of deciduous character. The brightness of that sunshiny December morning had its effect upon all parties. A cheery smile sat upon the face of the father, and brightened benevolently in his large blue eye; the white teeth of Bedford, the Superlative, never displayed their

massive outlines more conspicuously than while riding along with the boys, responding to their eager inquiries; and they, the lads, their young souls spoke out only in shout and caracole, in impatient question that stayed for no reply, and in the expression of an exulting confidence in the joys of the day, which nature herself seemed to counsel and encourage. The autumn still lingered among the tree-tops in robes of saffron and purple; and the life which animated them beside showed itself momently in groups of squirrels—white, black, and gray—which, darting from tree to tree, seemed really only to sport themselves for the amusement of the cavalcade and the annoyance of the dogs. Sometimes a covey of partridges flushed up from the brown and half-withered foliage along the track, and a couple of great turkey-hawks might be seen to rise, sweeping the air over the open field in wide circles, with keen eye bent upon the long grasses, in which the rabbit might be supposed to have slept the previous night. The track pursued by the party, though a narrow, was a sufficiently open one. Made studiously circuitous, it was a good two miles to the river, and every fifty or a hundred yards afforded some pleasant or picturesque changes to the eye. Now they skirted a hill upon whose brow sits a crown of the noblest pines, green, towering, and magnificent; and now they wind along a copse of bays, a thicket, whose leaves suffer only enough from the winter's frost to give forth those sweets of which none of the persuasions of the summer could beguile a single breath. A uniform dark green overspreads this re-

gion, save here and there where a great gum-tree, rising in the midst, shakes a head of glorious yellow aloft in lonely majesty. And now they pass into the levels of the swamp, through some choice cotton fields, in which, however, Colonel Openheart sees but little promise, during the present season, of realizing the usual bountiful returns. They are already nearly stripped of fruit; the white pods which commonly sprinkled these fields—as if strewn with blossoms of the dogwood, until the last of January, being quite beyond his power to pick until that period—show now but a scattered whiteness here and there, which rather mocks than satisfies the sight.

"Bad business here, Bedford, this season."

"Monstrous bad!" says Bedford, with a closing of the lips and a lugubrious shaking of the head. "Monstrous bad, sir; but such a *portentious* drought as devoured us, and such a *tempestious* tornado as beat us down after it, *jest* as the field was going to blow in September, was a ravaging of us that no cotton could stand under."

"We must do better next year, Bedford."

"Ef it's the will of Providence, there shall be another guess *desemblance* in our swamp next year."

"It must be, Bedford," was the rather emphatic reply of the colonel.

The negro was silent. The master proceeded: "The old Salem tract must be put in order with the beginning of the New Year. You know that I have bought the force of our old friend, Ben Butler. They will be here to-day. We must work them on that

tract, and must contrive to pay for them, in part, out of next year's crop. They are not the best negroes in the world, as you know, but we must manage them with prudence. I look to you, Bedford, to do your best"—the negro touched his beaver—" and I do not doubt that you can meet all my calculations. The seasons can scarcely be so bad again as they have been for the last two years."

But these details are sufficient. Crossing a pretty but shallow stream, which was skirted by a growth of gum, and traversed by occasional cypresses, of immense size, that strode clear away, six or eight feet deep in the water, the party emerged upon a hammock beyond which lay the river; and the impatient boys cantered away in front, while the colonel and Bedford continued at a more moderate pace. When the two latter reached the banks of the river, the urchins were already dismounted, and each had his pony fastened to the swinging limb of a tree; and here the object which had brought them to this point was at once presented conspicuously to the sight. Here, commanding the river, which was a broad and turbid stream, with a vast stretch of drowned swamp spreading away on the opposite side, was a tiny fortress, a redoubt of earth, with its bastions and its merlons, and a neat little two-pounder, looking out with impudent aspect upon the raftsmen going down the stream. In a moment, the colonel unrolled a nice silken banner, upon which the fair hands of Bessy Clinton had wrought a palmetto, and it was soon run up the staff, and floating gayly above the juvenile ramparts. And

it was to hear the thunder of this piece, and to see the smoke and fire issue from its jaws, that our boys, Tom, Dick, and Harry, would at any time abandon the more staid and regular amusements of the household. The smaller piece at home, manufactured from an old ship's blunderbuss, and set on a rude block before the house, though in itself a delight, and which they could venture to discharge themselves, was not to be spoken of in the same breath with the more formidable engine by which the river was commanded. Strange passion which the boy has for guns and uproar! Colonel Openheart encouraged this passion among his sons, and the fantastic notion of a fort at his *landing* on the river was a sort of tribute to the memory of his father, who had been one of the defenders of Fort Moultrie against the British. The fact—then proved for the first time—that a rifleman of the American forests made a first-rate artillerist, was one to be remembered by the son of one who had been conspicuous among those by whom the fact was so well proven; and the possession of a small British piece, which was one of the trophies awarded to his father's valor, had prompted the little battery that crowned the water approaches to "Maize-in-milk."

But the signal is given! The eager hearts of the boys are bounding violently against their ribs; their eyes are dilating; their heads stretched forward, and their whole souls filled with delicious expectation. The torch is applied, and the roar follows. Then they rush forward into the smoke, Dick leading the way, and even little Harry, convulsed with frenzy, rolling and

tumbling about in the sulphurous fog. Twice, thrice the discharge is made, and then the signal is given to resume the march. Each lad unfastens his horse, Bedford performing the office for little Harry, who is too proud, however, to admit of any help in clambering up his pony's sides. The adventure of the morning is over, and now back to the domicil for breakfast, with what appetite they may.

There they found old Mr. Bond and pretty Susan Bond, and other guests, already arrived; for their excursion to the river had somewhat encroached, in spite of all their efforts at early rising, upon the breakfast hour. The breakfast consisted of all the varieties known to a Carolina plantation of ante-revolutionary establishment. I don't know that it would be worth while to enumerate the various "creature comforts" under which the table groaned; and yet there may be some young persons among my readers to whom a *catalogue raisonée* may not be altogether without its uses. And first, then, for the inevitable dish of Indian corn, in its capacity of vegetable rather than breadstuff—hominy! Now, your yellow corn won't do for hominy—the color and the flavor are alike against it. It must be the genuine semitransparent flint, ground at a water-mill, white as snow, and swelling out in two huge platters at convenient places upon the table. A moderate portion of each plate is provided with this vegetable, boiled to a due consistency; neither too soft, like mush, nor too stiff, hard, and dry for easy adjustment with a spoon. It requires long experience on the part of the cook to

prepare this dish for the just appreciation of an adept. There must be no rising lump in the mass; there must be no dark speck upon the surface. The spoon should lie upon it without sinking below the rims, and hominy should always be eaten with a spoon or fork of silver. I name all these little particulars, as I assume the time to be approaching fast, when Great Britain and Ireland, and one-half the continent of Europe will be fed out of the American granaries, and when *hominy* will arrive at its position of true dignity and distinction in the *cuisine* of the Old World. The Carolina breakfast-table would be a blank without hominy.

That of "Maize-in-milk" had its usual bountiful supply on the present occasion, and was not without its variety of breadstuffs. There were loaves and cakes of wheat, corn, and rye, all the growth of the plantation; Colonel Openheart not being one of those conceited wiseacres who rely only upon the cotton market and neglect every other interest. It may be that he relied still too much upon the profits and prospects of the cotton market, so as to indulge in a too ready habit of expenditure, but he never was that purblind proprietor who forgets the farm in the staple; a class of people still quite too large in Carolina for their own and the good of the country. His table rejoiced in its rice cakes and waffles also, among his breadstuffs; rice being also one of the grains of his own production. But of these, enough is said already. Among the meats on table, to say nothing of cold corn-beef and boiled venison, we must spare a passing sentence to the sausages and black puddings. Christmas on the

southern plantation is emphatically the sausage season. Then it is, as old Mr. Bond was wont to say, that every negro is heard to whistle, and every mouth looks oily. But perhaps it is not every reader who knows what black puddings are. Well, we shall not pretend to enlighten those who are unhappily ignorant. It is enough to say that a black pudding is something in the nature of the Scotch *haggis*, so sublimely sung by Burns, without the deficiencies and infirmities of that venerable compound. It is less unsightly to the eye, and less unfriendly to the taste, more delicate in its flavor, and, perhaps, even more various in its ingredients. You shall find it a goodly commodity, taken along with its kindred, sausage and hominy, at a southern breakfast, when the Yule log is blazing. Colonel Openheart had just killed his usual hundred head of hogs, and this was one of the great events to bring happiness to the negro quarter. The great beef had also been slaughtered, and plenty and pleasure were conspicuous in every visage. No wonder the breakfast went off swimmingly. The boys were the happiest creatures in the world, and the achievements of the great gun were thrust into all ears. Not that they were either obtrusive or uproarious in the house with the guests or at the table. On these points, our colonel, though very indulgent generally, was something of a martinet, and breakfast was discussed and dispatched with a degree of order and quietude which only was not solemnity and stiffness. After breakfast the girls continued the work of decoration, and the boys went out to play. The lady of the house

had her preparations still in some degree to make, and the worthy colonel took charge of good Mr. Bond, and they went together to the farm-yard, comparing notes, and discussing peas, ploughs, and potatoes as they went. Soon, however, their attention was drawn to farther arrivals. First came poor old Kinsale, a worthy old Irishman—a farmer of small degree, who had been so long in America as to insist that yams and Spanish were the real potatoes of green Erin, and that the Irish potato had never been otherwise than sweet from the days of Sir Walter Raleigh. He was a good old man, seventy-six years or more, for whom Colonel Openheart sent his own horses and carriage every Christmas. Unlike Irishmen, who are not generally tenacious of early customs, he still wore small clothes and long stockings, having no better reason for his adherence to ancient fashions than the possession of a pair of legs which were formed after the best of ancient models. The youngsters of the day, however much they might smile at the tottering gait and rheumy eyes of old Kinsale, were not without a sufficient degree of taste to prompt envy of his calves. The red bandana about his neck, and the great hanging cape and flaps of his Marseilles vest were in odd contrast with the modern *sack*, of newest pattern, which had lately beguiled him by its cheapness, its bright colors and glittering buttons, at a Charleston slop-shop. The old fellow was now all agog for the war with Mexico, and his first demand was for the last newspapers which spoke of that event. But that the approaches of age were quite too une-

quivocal to suffer such an absurdity, it might have been that we should have heard him talk of volunteering in the Palmetto Regiment. But he was still strong to totter about field and stable; he disliked the house, and placing his chair under the shade of a group of great oaks that circled the centre of the lawn before the mansion of "Maize-in-milk," he indicated to the other gentleman the propriety of choosing that as the place for the reception of the arriving company. So here they all took seats together, with the newspapers in the grasp of old Kinsale, and a variety of potatoes of the largest dimensions, yam, Spanish, and brimstone, at his feet. These, with a laudable brag of Colonel Openheart, he had displayed as the largest which had been made anywhere that season. A few superior cotton-stalks were also beside them, with some mammoth turnips and great ears of corn. While they sat together, in rolled the barouche of Captain Whitfield with his family, five or seven in number, soon followed by Squire Whipple and a Mr. Bateman, who had just bought a snug farm in the neighborhood, and had been invited to share the Christmas hospitalities of "Maize-in-milk." All these were farmers of moderate resources, well to do in the world without being wealthy, a comfortable and improving people. Colonel Openheart's pleasure was to feel himself in a neighborhood with which he could sympathize; and with this object he had been for a long period engaged in the politic task of endeavoring to secure the affections of those around him. He made but little difference between his neighbors, except such as was

called for by moral differences among themselves; and if he thought of the poverty of any among them, it was only that he might remember the needy with more seasonable assistance.

But now other guests began to make their appearance, and as a stately carriage came whirling down the road, dear Bessy Clinton ran out to the trees where her father was seated, exclaiming—"It's Mary Butler, papa—that's the carriage;" and the eager eyes of the damsel sparkled as dewily bright as if the sunshine which they showed was about to issue from a tear. Sure enough, it was Mary Butler—but who is it with her? Bessy Clinton had never been so fortunate as to know Elijah Skinflint, Esq., the lawyer of Messrs. Ingelhart and Cripps, to whom the temporary charge of Mary Butler had been confided. Mr. Skinflint, though he owned a plantation a few miles above that of Colonel Openheart, was a practising lawyer at a distant court-house, which he seldom left, except hurriedly to cast an eye upon the doings of his overseer. His lean and angular person, red, searching, ferret-like eyes, and gaunt, erect frame were quite new to our Bessy Clinton, who, though anxious to embrace Mary Butler, somewhat shrunk from the idea of approaching the grim guardian who came along with her. But, Skinflint and all his terrors were forgotten, when her father lifted Mary from the carriage; and the fond damsel bounded to her friend, and took her about the neck with as much fervency as if all the blood from her heart had gone into her arms. She was about to lead the lovely

orphan away, when the voice of her father called her back; and she suffered a formal introduction to the redoubted lawyer, who had himself suggested the proceeding. Skinflint was evidently struck with the appearance of Bessy Clinton; who, for her age, was a tall and womanly-looking creature. I need not say she was a very lovely one. Skinflint appeared to think her so, and threw as much gentleness and animation into his glance, when he spoke with her, as a long practice in a very different school permitted him to do. He would have given her his arm in moving towards the house, but the damsel, too anxious to have Mary Butler to herself, contrived not to appear to see the awkward half-tender of civility which the learned barrister had made. In this way she got off, and the two girls were out of sight in an instant. The gentlemen again went towards their trees, where they soon forgot the other sex in a discussion which was equally shared between politics and potatoes.

Skinflint was something of a politician, but he met his match in old Kinsale. If the one was expert at weaving the knot of Gordius, the other had a prompt Alexandrine method of unloosing it. His sturdy practical mind, and clear direct judgment, made him more than a match for the lawyer, who soon contrived to get as far from him as possible. In a little while the attention of all parties was drawn to new objects, which appeared upon the highway. These were the negroes of the Butler estate, whom Colonel Openheart had so rashly purchased, and at such high prices. He had sent all his carts and wagons to bring them to

their new abodes, with all their prog and furniture. And a quaint and merry-looking cavalcade they made. The carts, four in number, the wagons, too, and a great ox-cart, were all laden heavily with baggage and bedding. Grinning little urchins lay on the top, and the able-bodied walked beside the vehicles. Each carried something in his hands, or a wallet upon his shoulders. More than one old fiddle was to be seen among them, and the song with which they accompanied the crazy music of its strings, only ceased when they came in sight of the group beneath the trees. Colonel Openheart, followed by his guests, went out to the roadside to speak to them as they passed. He had a pleasant word for each, and shook hands with old Enoch, the patriarch of the plantation, where the latter sat in the wagon which brought up the rear. Bedford appropriately made his appearance at this moment, and took charge of the cavalcade, which he conducted to the quarters prepared for them. Affectionate memories of his friend, Ben Butler, caused the eyes of Colonel Openheart to grow dim as he shook hands with the aged negroes; but a very different sentiment was in those of Lawyer Skinflint. Be sure, that excellent citizen had thoughts in his mind, as he beheld the scene, which he would never have ventured to declare in any of his pleadings. But the worthy colonel neither saw nor suspected anything, and his deportment to Skinflint, whom he did not love, was quite as courteous and kind as to any other of his guests. For that matter, as the day advanced, Skinflint began to grow in favor. He evidently took some

pains to make himself agreeable. He was a man of considerable experience and information; had travelled, was well read, and not entirely wanting in those finer tastes which so happily garnish even the conversation of the merely sensible. He could be sportive when he would; and a vein of dry humor, which at the bar was causticity, seasoned his most ordinary conversation. He was habitually a hard man—cold, ascetic; sarcastic, selfish; with but little sympathy for humanity in its susceptibilities, and in those pliant movements of the heart and fancy, which the worldling is apt to regard as weaknesses. But he knew how to humor the moods of others; and, with an object in view, he could play the pleasant companion for an hour, or a day—nay, quite as long as he had anything to gain by it. And he had something to gain at "Maize-in-milk;" at least, we already half suspect the grim bachelor of being more than pleased with the graces and charms of dear Bessy Clinton. We don't know that any eye but ours beheld him, as, frequently, in the progress of the day, his glance was fixed on the fair face and beautifully rounded form of the maiden, with a positive show of interest and pleasure. The insolent! He to presume on the affections of that sweet creature—that incarnation of all that is delicate and dear in humanity and woman!

But the day passes—O! most pleasantly to all; and the young increase in numbers as the hours melt into the past; and the brightness grows in every eye as, sporting on the lawn, they seem to hurry the footsteps of the sun. And he sets at last! Then emerg-

ing from an ancient closet, our host brings forth the rude charred fragments of a half-burned log. It is the Yule log of the last year. The hall chimney is carefully denuded of all its fires—the sticks are taken out, the hearth is swept. The great back-log, chosen for the fire of the new year, is brought in, and the fragments of last year's log are employed to kindle it. Our colonel delighted to continue, as nearly as he could with propriety, the customs of his English ancestors; and his own shoulders bore the log from the woodpile, and his own hands lighted the brands of the new year's fire as the sun went down. Doubtless, there is some superstition in all this; but such superstitions are not without their charm, and have their advantages. The superstitions which tend in some degree to make us forgetful of self, are equally serviceable to humanity and religion.

The tea-things are removed; the night advances, the sable fiddler has made his appearance; and, seated in the piazza, attended by an urchin with a rude tambourine, he brings forth sounds which have a strange effect upon youthful feet and fancies. The dance begins, and, for two hours, the girls and boys foot it merrily in the great hall. Then a few steal away to another apartment, and there the eggs are broken. One seizes upon the bowl, another upon the dish, and they proceed to manufacture a noggin of eggs; that luscious draught not to be foregone, styled, in homely parlance, *eggnog!* not an inebriating beverage in that temperate household. The dance ceases; the draught is enjoyed; the more youthful disappear, and the

sweet voice of Bessy Clinton, as she sings another of her ancient Christmas carols, is the signal for the separation of the company that night at the mansion of "Maize-in-milk." Verily, Lawyer Skinflint never in his life before appeared so devotedly fond of music. He hung upon the tones of the sweet songstress as if she were especially the sweet singer in Israel, while she poured forth, at her father's summons, the old "Carol for Christmas Eve."

Where, among the pasturing rocks,
The glad shepherds kept their flocks,
Came an angel to the fold,
And, with voice of rapture, told,
That the Saviour, Christ, was born!

Born in Bethlehem, sacred place,
Of a virgin full of grace;
In a manger, lowly spot,
Symbol of his mortal lot,
Lo! the Saviour, Christ, is born!

Dread and glorious was the bright
Of that sudden, shining light,
Which, around the angel then,
Tokened to the simple men,
That the Saviour, Christ, was born!

But the voice that filled the blaze,
Cheered them in their deep amaze;—
"Tidings of great joy I bring,"
In the coming of your King:
The true Shepherd, Christ, is born.

CHAPTER III.

And never did a Christmas morning dawn more cheerily on human eyes than did this, so much looked for at "Maize-in-milk," in St. Matthews. The harmony of heart within, seemed to lend its aspect to the outer world; and though at sunrise a heavy white frost lay upon the fields and woods, yet the day was sweetly mild and the atmosphere vigorous and bracing. The song-birds are seldom forest-birds. They fly to the shelter and countenance of man, from the deep thickets where the hostile vermin keep shelter. Perhaps there is an intellectual consciousness which they feel, that the human is the most justly appreciative audience. So the smaller birds of game harbor only in the neighborhood of fields which are cultivated by man, not for the reason assigned by M. Chateaubriand, but simply because these furnish most readily the food which they desire; and because here, also, in the neighborhood of human habitations, they are less likely to fall victims to the prowling owl and fox, or the vigilant hawk. Now the proprietors of "Maize-in-milk" had, from time immemorial, been disposed to acknowledge the confidence which the feathered tribes thus tacitly seemed to repose in their forbearance; and, in the immediate proximity of the homestead, no hostile gun was permitted to ruffle a bird's feathers. The song-birds laughed merrily at noontide and morning in the roof-tree, and had no apprehension; and

the partridge led her young along the roadside, skirting the hedge of box and myrtle, having no fear of being thought a trespasser. Our Christmas morning on the present occasion, was particularly distinguished by these free forest visitors, who came about the habitation, to the great delight of the guests, as if they not only were disposed to assert their privileges, but as if they knew that the season was one for Sunday clothes and merry-making. When poor old Kinsale rose, therefore, some time before the sun, and before any other of the household—for old age requires fewer hours for sleep than youth—very sweet and pleasant was the sight that greeted his aged eyes. Sitting in the great massive porch of the building, which faced the south, a wide lawn spread out before him covered with green trees. These were of the various sorts of oak and orange, with a sprinkling of laurel and other trees, most of which were aged like himself, but showing far greater proofs of vigor. Their heavy tops were populous cities of song-birds. Here the redbird flourished, with his crimson tufts, satisfied with his glorious plumage and his brief but complacent note. Here was the imperial mock-bird, one of which, well known to the household, and fed with crumbs by the children—old Puck—very soon discerned a stranger in the portico, and was sending forth a short sharp and querulous inquiry, which might be translated, "and who are you, my good fellow? and what do you want?" But though pleased with the familiarity of the bird—for if there be anything which age most loves, it is society—old Kinsale was not the person to

invite them by his presence. The summer of childhood is always most effectual, and, failing to conciliate the suspicions of old Puck, who hopped off at his call to one of his remotest twigs—the old man turned his attention upon the great trees of the park, and finally beyond them, to the open fields. It was the policy of the proprietor of "Maize-in-milk" to maintain about his household as much of the aspect of spring and freshness as he could. His fields on the right were accordingly covered with a vigorous growth of wheat, which, in his hands, was a crop of respectable production for Carolina. While his less considerate neighbors were satisfied to get but eight bushels of this luxuriant grain from the average acre, he, by skilful dressing, and the free use of lime, contrived to extract nearly thrice that quantity. On the opposite side was to be seen a broad tract of rye, green and growing, while beyond, on every hand, spread a wall of thickly wooded copse and forest, by which each of his fields was girdled, and through which lay pleasant walks and openings to the corn and cotton fields still farther distant. The settlements at "Maize-in-milk," standing upon a hill, gave a very extensive view on every side. Looking from the rear of the dwelling, the eye might discern, a few miles off, the great gray tops of the cypress that looked forth from the dark recesses of the swamp. For these objects old Kinsale had an eye. They had harbored the aged man in the Revolution from some of his Tory neighbors.

But he was not suffered long to indulge in his solitary survey. Soon the children came skipping forth,

Tom, Dick, and Harry, each clamoring with new discoveries. Santa Claus visits us in the South, too, but under no such Dutch appellation. We do not confound the day of St. Nicholas with that of Christmas, though we distinguish them, in the old houses, by similar customs, borrowed, however, from our English ancestry. With us, the good genius of the nativity, in a merely social point of view, is good old Father Christmas himself. The benevolent old graybeard makes his presents to the children, under this more seemly appellation. And the urchins are very well accustomed to look for his coming. They hang their stockings in the chimney-place, each with a sprig of ivy, or cassina, or holly, or sumach, either or all, in tribute to the venerable visitor. These he withdraws, and leaves in place of them such gifts as he deems best suited to the character and the deserts of his *protégé*. To some of these a bunch of hickories conveys a rebuke and threat, which by no means makes the coming of Father Christmas a merry one.

Our lads and lasses at "Maize-in-milk" had done their best to merit, or, at all events, to receive the bounties of the ancient patron. Tom had hung his new boots, the first pair that had ever embraced his ankles, upon sticks pendent over the fender. Dick, more ambitious of favor, had occupied a chair fronting the fireplace, with one or more suits of clothes, hat and shoes included, from each of which, capable of holding them, might be seen the protruding green and red of the sumach and the holly. Harry, without pockets to his breeches, had put his cap, shoes, and

stockings. The girls had also made provision for their guest. The tiny stockings of dear little Rose were placed conspicuously not to escape attention, while Mary Butler, Susan Bond, and Bessy Clinton, had set their nice white baskets, beautifully dressed with flowers mingled with holly, on different sides of the fireplace in their chamber.

And now came forth the boys, each bounding tumultuously with his treasure, which had come with the dawn of Christmas. They had all slept with an eye open, eager to see what sort of visage the old man would put on. Dick swears he saw him; a big man, in a sort of white overall, or shirt, with a great basket on his arm, a great pair of horns on his head, and a long beard, like moss, hanging to his knees. Tom thinks he saw him; but is of opinion that he had on petticoats, and looked something like his mamma; while little Harry slept through it all. As for the girls, we can only say that, when asked what they saw, Bessy Clinton and Mary Butler smiled knowingly, but said nothing; while dear little Rose insists that Father Christmas was a big lady like her own mamma.

But for their gifts! Old Kinsale had the first sight of these. The treasures of each were spread before him, and he was called upon to decide on their value. Tom emptied his boots to display a pair of spurs, a buck-handled knife, and a very pretty flageolet, with all of which he seemed very well contented. Dick held himself quite as lucky with one small qualification. His trophies were, a knife also, but smaller than that of Tom's, a bag of marbles, an India-rubber

ball, a *bilboketch*, or cup and ball, a joint-snake, and *a bunch of hickory switches*. There was something in every pocket or receptacle among his clothes, from which the holly sprig had been taken. Little Harry was quite satisfied with certain toys that leapt like frogs, barked like dogs, or rolled and grunted like hogs. He was also indulged in a tipsy Turk, with his *chibouque*, manufactured in *papier maché*. The gifts of Father Christmas to the girls were in less doubtful taste. Dear little Rose had her toys, it is true; but Bessy Clinton found in her basket a beautifully bound copy of the common-prayer, and a fine ladies' gold watch. A single sentence written in antique characters, evidently by King Christmasse himself, warned her to use the first gift properly that she might not lose the value of the second. Mary Butler had a ring with the initials of Bessy Clinton. Susan Bond was not forgotten. Her tribute of holly disappeared, and a very pretty musical-box, with a handsome set of chess-men, and a beautiful copy of Pilgrim's Progress, remained in place of it. The ancient sire had chosen judiciously. He knew the tastes of all parties, and their deserts too. They were all satisfied equally with his liberality and justice; and, in their satisfaction with their treasures, the great gun was almost forgotten. Its sharp and loud report routed the rest of the sleeping household, and each urchin, lying in wait, made the house ring again, as the several members came forth, with "Merry Christmas, papa! Merry Christmas, mamma!" "I've caught you—I've caught you!" And this led to a

new distribution of gifts. Father Christmas had done his duty, but the ordinary sire of the household must do his—and the mother, and the sister, and all;—and the custom did not confine these claims to the children, but extended to the house-servants, none of whom forgot that the advent of Father Christmasse, gave them claims upon *massa* and *missis*, which were to be urged early in the morning, with vociferous cries, as soon as they should show their faces.

Before this rout had well subsided, the girls, Bessy Clinton, Mary Butler, and Susan Bond, were busy at another and equally essential part of the ceremonies of the season. Each had a pile of eggs before her, and there were huge bowls and dishes spread out, and great vessels of sugar and a decanter of wine; and the eggs were broken, the whites emptied into the dish, the yolks into the bowl, and Susan Bond, seizing upon the bowl, began to beat away with a spoon like mad, stirring in every now and then a modicum of sugar with the yolks, till they lost their golden hue and put on one more silvery and less rich. At the same time, our Bessy Clinton, even more busy, and at the more laborious process, was beating the white and mucilaginous portions of the egg into a thick foam of such final consistency that she could turn the vessel upside down without losing a drop of the commodity. This was the standard point, which, once attained, the yolk and white were again to be united, the wine was to embrace the two in its ardent grasp, and the whole was then fit for the palate of Father Christmasse himself, the King of the Feast. This is eggnog—

a noggin of which is the necessary preface to a Christmas breakfast, after the old fashion in Carolina. This discussed, and breakfast followed, ample and various as the preceding day; and then all parties sallied forth, in several groups, to ride, to ramble, and to hunt. Two or three of the young men, taking Tom Openheart along with them, and calling up the hounds, set off to chase the deer. Numerous *drives* on the ample estate of "Maize-in-milk" promised abundant sport. We shall not follow the hunters, but content ourselves with saying that their efforts were rewarded with a fine fat doe and a monstrous wild-cat, four feet from snout to tail, inclusive, that made famous play with hounds and hunters, and was only caught after three hours' running and doubling, and a most terrific fight.

Meanwhile, breakfast scarcely over at "Maize-in-milk," a new collection of shining faces appeared about the porch of the dwelling, in waiting for the appearance of "old maussa" without. These were the *field* negroes, under the lead of ancient Enoch, including those not only of the plantation proper, but those also who had just been bought of the Butler estate. The household servants, as we have already hinted, had made sure of their "Christmas" as soon as the family budged out of their several chambers. And such a chorus of cries and salutations! Such a happy variety of voices in the same monotonous chant of "Merrie Chrystmasse." There were voices of lame, halt, and blind; beginning with old Dolly, a white-headed matron of ninety-three, whose memory was a complete chronicle

of the revolutionary warfare. Blind and deaf, she sat between her great-great-grandchildren, on the steps of the porch, and shook her palsied head, with a feeble chirrup, which was drowned in the more vigorous burden of a hundred more, whose lungs deferred but little to her weight of years. And there was Binah, the mute; and Tony, the one-armed; and Polly, the half-witted; and Diana, the rheumatic, and a dozen more of both sexes, whom the master only knew as dependents for whom he had to provide, and who were of more trouble and expense to him than thrice their number of the rest. But of this our excellent proprietor did not complain. Indeed, these poor creatures were particular objects of his attention. He was content to take the evil with the good; and he regarded these old heirlooms as so many subjects of his father, who, having served their time faithfully, deserved to be protected and provided for during the future, in consideration of the past. There was no discharging the operative the moment he ceased to be useful.

And such a clamor as was raised, as our Colonel Openheart came forth at the head of his guests, as if his benevolence was now to be assailed by storm. The jaws of eighty or more were instantly unclosed upon him; and "God bless you, maussa,"—"Merry Christmas, old maussa,"—"How all is, dis merrie Christmas,"—"Hoping you live tousand merry Christmas more,"—"And all de chillans;" these were some few of the burdens of their common song. Some had it in rhyme, borrowed probably from the school-boys:—

"Christmas come but once de year,
Da's wha' mak' we come up yer (*here*)."

Or,

"Enty dis da Christmas come?
Yer's de nigger look for some!"

Or,

"Merrie Christmas, maussa, for true,
You' ole niggers pray for you;"

And, from another voice, as if by way of chorus,

"Gee 'um only you good cheer,
An' you'll hab de happy New Year."

For this scene our excellent proprietor had been accustomed to prepare. In this respect he followed the example of his ancestor, and, indeed, of most of the very old native proprietors. A sort of peddler's variety was produced from a huge case, which had been brought up from the city a few days before. To some were given knives and scissors, caps, shawls, and handkerchiefs. Others had hatchets, razors, tobacco, and cases of pins and needles. Some chose cotton or wool cards—for most of the negro women of *character* on a plantation, carry on some little domestic manufactures of their own; and others were quite content with queer clumsy toys, and great grinning masks, with which they could amuse or frighten the more simple of their own or of neighboring plantations. Money is seldom given, never by a judicious proprietor, as it is sure to be spent perniciously at some neighboring groggery.

This distribution of Christmas presents occupied an hour or more. In some instances, but not often, and

only when Col. Openheart could trust the good sense of the recipient, he was permitted to choose his article for himself. They all withdrew, more or less satisfied —their greasy, grinning faces doing ample justice, by their expression, to the bounty of the master, and the fulness of the hog-meat upon which they had been feasting for a week past.

Lawyer Skinflint was not satisfied with the spectacle he witnessed. He thought it a mode of spoiling them. They would always expect such favors. It invited familiarity. It would provoke jealousy among themselves. It would be productive of many other mischiefs which we shall not mention. To all these Col. Openheart opposed evasive answers only. It was not the season for discussion; nor was he, in his old age, to discuss or doubt the propriety of a practice which his grandfather and father had pursued before him without being thought worse persons than their neighbors. The excellent lawyer only ceased his pleadings with the appearance of the ladies in the portico, when he addressed himself with a benignant smile to Mrs. Openheart, and, after a few studied phrases about the day, turned to play the gallant with lovely Bessy Clinton; a new *rôle*, which seemed by no means native.

The horses were now in readiness, the carriage and barouche. All parties were preparing to go forth. Col. Whitfield, with his wonted promptness, offered his services to Mrs. Openheart and Mrs. Whipple, for a drive; while Misses Whipple and Jones, failing to persuade Bessy Clinton, Mary Butler, and Susan Bond from the saddle to the barouche, very civilly offered

to take up good old father Kinsale. Having ascertained how Bessy Clinton went, the lawyer determined to engage also in equestrianship, though really inclining, by reason of his peculiar physique, to the cushions; and he, Col. Openheart, Mr. Bond, and the two boys, became the companions of the three girls, and were soon mounted upon the liveliest and pleasantest pacers in the whole parish. It was a day for horseback, and the "righte merrie" cavalcade dashed at once up the highway for a mile; then, turning aside, proceeded to pay an annual visit, in especial, to the old fort, overlooking the river, remarkable for its local traditions; where you may yet see the proofs of the devil's presence, in one of his ancient frolics, in the tracks of his tail and carriage wheels—a legend which, at some future and convenient season, we shall have to put in print. The description of the scenery along the route taken by our party we must reserve for the same occasion. Enough to say of it that it harmonized admirably with the bracing air, the calm, generous sunshine, and the rapid but easy motion of the horses. All parties were delighted—eyes were in a glow, cheeks were brightly flushed, and even our lawyer, who kept his horse neck-and-neck, like a young gallant, with that of Bessy Clinton, talked of nothing but purling brooks, green leaves, and love in a cottage, the whole way. The sweet, gentle-hearted girl heard him with respectful kindness, and answered without hesitation or reserve. She had no suspicions of his gallantry, to put her on her reserves; and all things might have gone, with him, "as merry as a

marriage bell," but for a slight incident which happened on the route.

Dashing suddenly into the main road, on their way back to "Maize-in-milk," they came unexpectedly upon another party, the sight of which kindled the eyes equally of Col. Openheart and Bessy Clinton. "Why, Bessy," said the colonel, "that is Mrs. Berkshire's carriage, surely. What brings her from the city?" The words were scarcely spoken, when the head of a young man was thrust forth from the carriage, which was in front, and suggested a new conclusion to our worthy proprietor of "Maize-in-milk." "It is she, and that is her son, Fergus, just from college;" and, with the words, giving his horse the spur, our colonel dashed ahead, and was soon alongside of the vehicle and the persons in question. In another moment the carriage was stopped, Colonel Openheart alighted, and, changing places with young Berkshire, the latter soon joined the young ladies by whom the rear was brought up. A handsome, tall, high-spirited young fellow was Fergus Berkshire. He spoke to Bessy Clinton as to an old acquaintance, and our lawyer watched, with some uneasiness, the sudden flush upon the cheek of the damsel as she hailed the youth's approach. He soon explained the motive of the sudden appearance of himself and mother.

"The old mansion-house and estate were in bad condition, and something was to be done with it before he went to Europe. Of course," he added, "it is our purpose, now, to spend our Christmas at 'Maize-in-milk.'"

Bessy heard and answered him with undisguised pleasure.

"You know, Fergus," she answered, "you are always at home with us."

"We took that for granted," said the youth, "though I almost feared that a three years' absence had caused you to forget us all."

"And you go soon again?" she inquired.

"Yes; mother is anxious to comply with the earnest wishes of my poor father, whose instructions were, that, after leaving college, I was to pass two years in foreign travel. We shall spend a couple of weeks here, with your permission, get our new overseer fairly under weigh, then proceed to the city and to New York, so that our preparations may be complete for sailing in the May packet."

He was silent, and so was Bessy Clinton. A certain gravity which was unusual overspread her face. We will not trouble ourselves just now to ask wherefore this was so. Let it suffice that, from whatever source her emotion may have sprung, it did not make her forgetful of the courtesies; and the introduction of the newcomer to the rest of the company took place *selon les règles*. Our lawyer's share in this proceeding was conducted with sufficient stiffness; but it escaped the notice of all parties, except possibly young Berkshire himself; who, by the way, did not seem greatly to consider the presence of our excellent Skinflint. He soon contrived to get himself close beside our heroine, and on her bridle-hand, and they jogged along together rather too slowly, it would seem, for the at-

torney, whose steed had suddenly become possessed of the idea of going forward with all possible rapidity. An hour brought all parties home safely to "Maize-in-milk," and after the interchange of the usual courtesies with the newly arrived, the company was left to dispose of itself as the several members pleased, until dinner time. We will but remark that Berkshire was the first person to emerge after making his toilet, and sweet Bessy Clinton was the first to find him in the parlor. The person who next entered to them was Skinflint, who listened demurely to the conversation of the young people, without taking part in it, wondering to himself, all the while, what in the name of common sense people could find to please their minds in the prattle about their days of childhood. Fergus Berkshire and Bessy Clinton made much more of the theme than sour old Skinflint had ever made of his childhood. He, unhappily for himself, had never known the period. He was born a man—hard, wiry, inflexible, calculating, selfish—with his coat buttoned up to his chin, and his hard intellect busy from the first in stifling all his natural affections.

Old Colonel Openheart was one of those to whom the every-day world would give the title, sneeringly, of a man of affectations. He was certainly no humdrum personage. His Christmas dinner, for example, was not a good dinner merely. It was a *Christmas* dinner. He did not summon his guests to eat, simply, and to drink. The mere swill was not his object. The intellectual tastes were to be consulted, the fancies, the very superstitions, which, in the pro-

gress of the ages would naturally accumulate about the practices of a people on peculiar occasions. His Christmas was a season of equal thanksgiving and enjoyment. There was to be a natural ebullition of the feelings at such a time. There should be exultation. High and humble should equally show gratitude; and the natural expression of gratitude is good-humor and cheerfulness. The high was to be high only in the exercise of an ability to make the lowly glad and happy; the humble was to exult in gratifications which showed them consciously in possession of bounties bestowed, in the first instance, by the Lord of all, and intermediately by those whose only boast was in being able in some degree to follow his example in its bounties and its sympathies. Colonel Openheart strove for these objects. We have glimpsed at some of his household modes of doing this. His Christmas dinner, as it appealed somewhat to the superstitions and the fancies, was designed for this end also. And when the great hall was thrown open to his guests, dressed in a deep Gothic garment of green boughs and branches, sprinkled with red berries and blue, with candles distributed between, and a great oak wood fire blazing at the extremity—with a stately arch of green at each end of the table, and one of triumphal aspect and colossal size spanning its centre —the entering company felt themselves transported to the old baronial domains of our Anglo-Norman ancestry, and their minds were naturally elevated with the moral sentiments which grew out of their recollections of history. The quaint masking was not

without its influence. The device was a homily; and when the head waiter made his appearance, bringing in, as the first dish, the "boar's head," done after the ancient Saxon method, dressed in rosemary, and with a huge lemon in its open mouth, they were all in the mood to join in chorus with the host, who, knife in hand, began chanting merrily the ancient carol:—

"*Caput api defero*
Reddens laudes Domino.
"The bore's head in hand bring we
With garlands gay and rosemarie,
I pray you all sing merrily,
Qui estes in convivio.

"This head you must understand,
Is chief service in this land,
Looke wherever it be scanned,
Servite cum cantico.

"Be glad, gentles, lord and lasse,
That to cheer you this Chrystmasse,
We do bid the bore's head passe,
Clad in rue and rosemarie."

Set in the centre of the table, this "armed head" was soon surrounded by the several solid meats for which John Bull has always been renowned, and the taste for which has been amply inherited in the South, with certain "graffings" of our own. Ham and turkey, for example, are certain as the day at our Christmas, and when venison is procurable it is never omitted from the board. But ours is no mere catalogue. The reader must imagine the variety. He must suppose the presence of roast and boiled—the

beef and the venison pastry—the duck as well as the turkey, and much of these to have been stricken wild in the woods and waters, with all the provoking freshness of the game flavor upon them. Wines of ancient denomination—Madeira that had been walled up for thirty years, and sherry that had grown pale, indeed, from weight of years, was at hand; but our host confined himself, on this day, chiefly to his new supply of natty English ale—a potation which did honor to the British breweries. The dessert was composed of the fruits of Cuba and the North, nuts and figs, not forgetting pindars, groundnuts, or peanuts, as they call them north of the Delaware. Nor had the damsels of the household neglected the usual preparation of mince-pies and plum-puddings. In the latter article, in particular, our worthy colonel was resolute to do honor to his ancient English origin, and the plum-pudding was as certainly upon his Christmas table as was the soused head of the boar.

Day slipped away unconsciously while the parties were still at table. It seemed as if the quaintness of the feast and the admirable humor of "Mine Hoste" had penetrated all hearts, and made each wholly forgetful of his cares. Even the excellent attorney was subdued to a temporary oblivion of the acridity which belonged to the profession, and the peculiar rigidity with which he practised it; and, at the close of a certain number of glasses of old south-side Madeira, to which he did (like Desdemona—eh?) "seriously incline," he might have been seen pelting our Bessy Clinton with almonds across the table, with

a studied slyness of intention which his skill did not enable him to realize, and the familiarity of which made young Fergus Berkshire look rather graver than his wont. Suddenly the great gun in the park in front was heard to explode, and then followed a huzza from Tom, Dick, and Harry, and a cloud of urchins whom they had gathered to the event. This uproar was succeeded by one of more gentle influence. The violin was heard in an adjoining apartment, the tambourine responded with its lively jingle, while the heavy foot of old Jake Priester, the white-headed butler of the establishment, gave notice to the young people of stirring preparation, which would task all the lightness of their heels and hearts. But these were preparatory notes only, for old Jake always took some time to get his foot and fiddle in tune, and to put little Christier, his grandson, in training with his tambourine. Of the dance which followed we shall say nothing, except that "*will-he, nill-he,*" Skinflint was resolute to dance with sweet Bessy Clinton. This was a bold resolution of the attorney. He had certainly taken lessons in his youth ; but that day had gone by many years, and his practice had been much more constant and devoted in the courts of law thán in those of beauty. Still, he had not forgotten the figures, and the wine of Colonel Openheart had enlivened his head, if it had not strengthened the virtue in his heels. He was not to be outdone by any young fellow, however fresh from college. But how, in the Virginia reel which followed, he contrived to get entangled between Bessy Clinton and Fergus Berkshire, and to take his

length on the floor in consequence, is not easily understood. He himself ascribed it entirely to the awkwardness or the malice of young Berkshire, whom he did not remember, accordingly, with any especial affection. While the young people were dancing in the mansion of "Maize-in-milk," the blacks were busy in the "Negro Quarter." Thither Colonel Openheart soon withdrew, accompanied by Whitfield, Whipple, Bond, and the older portion of the company. The negroes had their fiddle also—nay, they had three of them, such as they were—one belonging to "Maize-in-milk," one from the Butler estate, and one who volunteered from a neighboring plantation. Such wholesale *abandon* as they showed—so much recklessness of care, and toil, and vexation of spirit—would delight a philanthropist from Utopia. Every house had its circle, with open doors—and the grounds between their several cabins were filled with jigging groups—tossing heads, kicking shins, rompings and rollicking—with the rare impulse of so many happy urchins just let loose from school. They had their supper too, and devoured a good-sized barbacued steer, and several hogs, to say nothing of sundry possums, made captive the night before. Of bread, the consumption was intolerably vast; and some fifty gallons of *persimmon* beer—an innocent domestic beverage of their own manufacture, somewhat resembling cider—were finished before the fiddlers and dancers showed signs of weariness. It grew to the shortest possible hours before "Maize-in-milk" was everywhere fairly wrapped in slumber.

CHAPTER IV.

We trust that our readers have not forgotten our last Christmas at "Maize-in-milk." Since that period, two anniversaries of this happy season have elapsed—we will not say how happily—at that ancient manor. But times have somewhat changed since then. The weather now has grown less favorable to field sports. The sun is far less cheering. The fields look gloomy. The woods, stripped of their foliage, have a ghostly aspect, that chills and discourages. It lacks some three weeks to Christmas, yet the cotton fields, which at good seasons were wont to look white until the middle of January, are now absolutely bare. The naked stems, shorn of *boll* and fruit, stunted, slender, and with few and feeble branches, declare that the season has been unfriendly, and that the crop is short. The spring rains were unfavorable to a *stand;* the rich swamp bottoms were inundated, when the plant should have been up; the growing season continued wet and cold; and when the partial crop, which did promise to mature, was about to do so, a new enemy appeared in the caterpillar and the army-worm. These filthy insects, worse than the locusts of the East, swept the fields in a single night. The leaves of the plant first disappeared beneath their devouring ravages; the unopened bolls then perished; and they fastened finally upon the stems and fruit, though with an appetite somewhat diminished. The worthy pro-

prietor of "Maize-in-milk" was the first to suffer. His fields were chiefly of that class which felt the evil consequences of excessive moisture. The heavy rains of spring, the continued inundations throughout the summer, and the numerous pests which a burning sun drew forth from the rank moisture of the fen and forest, were peculiarly injurious to the low, but rich swamp tracts which constituted his most productive acres. His best lands, his chief reliance, failed him, and he might be seen, towards the close of a cheerless day, the second week in December, alone, and riding gloomily and slow from his river fields towards his dwelling. He felt all the sadness of the prospect. There were considerations working in his mind, which rendered this failure particularly distressing, if not absolutely fearful. The two previous seasons, though not so absolutely lost as the present, were yet not productive. They had not enabled him to diminish the debt which he had incurred by the purchase of the Butler negroes. Not a cent of this money had been paid beyond the interest, and that, for the year about to finish, was not to be realized from the products of the present crop. Economy is not, unhappily, a frequent virtue in the household of a southern planter of the old school. His income lessens, but that does not imply any lessening of his expenses. He does not like to approach, or to consider this necessity. His training, in fact, has been such as not to suffer him to do it. He knows not well how to put down his horses; to forbear the dinner-parties and pleasure-parties to which his neighbors have become accustomed as well

as himself; to put his family and negroes upon short commons, and to sell unnecessary property in time to save himself. Colonel Openheart was no simpleton. He did not lack courage. He was not blind to his danger. He was not insensible to the claims of his creditors. But the habit of living like a prince, and training his children to do the same, and feasting his poorer neighbors like a feudal lord—these made the necessity of contracting equally difficult and irksome. He felt how childish was the pride which made him unwilling to confess his inability, but the habit of thinking and acting in one way only was incorrigible. He did not lack the courage to say to himself, there must be no more of this fine living; but how say it to his wife, whom he had married an heiress, who had always been accustomed to the luxuries he was required to suppress, and whose mature years might render it peculiarly difficult to submit to any change; and how say it to dear Bessy Clinton, whom the world looked upon as an heiress; and to the boys at college, how cut off their allowance; and Ned, in Europe, who had been no small spendthrift, how declare to him that his drafts could no longer be honored? These were all duties which thrust themselves for serious consideration upon our excellent proprietor, and darkened his brow to a corresponding shadow with that which rested on the natural landscape. Some of these duties had already been attended to. Ned had been long since summoned home from Europe; the boys at college had been warned that with the close of the present year they must be satisfied

with but a pittance of the money which had hitherto supplied their wants; and to his wife and Bessy Clinton, the amiable husband and father had dealt in hints of his approaching difficulties, which neither of them understood. A secret instinct warned our proprietor that his great trouble was with Skinflint, the attorney of Ingelhart and Cripps, executors of the estate of Butler. There had already been some negotiations between them, which had given Colonel Openheart a taste of the quality of this person. He was, it is true, exceedingly polite and specious, but very searching, very scrupulous, and very expensive. One thing more than all had impressed our planter with disquiet in relation to the attorney; it was a gradual approach to forwardness, consequence, and the show of an imperious will on the part of the other, in due proportion to the evidently increasing necessity for indulgence on the side of Openheart. The latter was made to anticipate the sting of being at the mercy of one with whom he could have no sympathy; and it was very clear that the attorney was impatient for the moment when he could compel that recognition of his importance, which, as a man, Openheart had apparently shown no disposition to entertain. Our proprietor paced his cheerless fields with a momently increasing cheerlessness of mood. He was joined by old Enoch, to whom for several minutes he said nothing. At length, shaking his head, he exclaimed: "Old man, this might have been better!"

"How, better, maussa, enty de rain and de caterpillar?"

"I know all about the rain and the caterpillar; I know the mischief they have done, and wish to hear nothing on that subject;—but had you minded what I said, had you taken in the upper fields instead of the lower, they would not have been drowned, and we should have saved sixty acres there at least; but no, you must have your own way; you must know better than anybody else."

"Well, maussa, you nebber been say plant dem, and leff de lower field; you say, 'I *tink* you better plant dem upper,' and *I* been tink diffren, so I tells you, and you say, '*Well!*'"

The answer was conclusive. Colonel Openheart, instead of issuing his orders, had left it to Enoch's discretion, contenting himself with giving a suggestion instead of a command. This is a frequent error of the old planter of Carolina.

"Well, it is too late now to complain. How are your cattle?"

"De winter is mighty hard 'pon *dem*, maussa."

"How many hogs have you got in pen for slaughter?"

"Sebenty-tree."

"Instead of a hundred and fifty. How do you account for that, Enoch, when we turned out more than two hundred and fifty into the swamp last spring, and your hog-minder has been carrying out his three bushels of corn daily, for six months, to keep them up?"

"Well, maussa, dere's no telling; but de varmints in de swamp is mighty hard 'pon de pigs dis season—

de wild-cat, de niggers, and dem poor buckrah, Moses Daborne, 'Lishe Webter, Zeke Tapan, and dat half Ingin, Sam Johnson. Ef you could only clear de swamp of dem white niggers, you could raise hog tell you couldn't count dem."

"The old story! Enough. Ride up to the post-office and bring me the papers and letters."

Our proprietor was once more alone. "The world goes wrong with me on every side. I am either destined, or I am imbecile. I have certainly been weak and erring, profligate, thoughtless; as wildly confident of the future as ever was a poor boy with a pocket full of shillings and a long holiday before him. I must amend promptly or all is lost. If Ingelhart and Cripps, or rather, if Skinflint will indulge, one good crop will gain me time; two good crops at good prices, and all would be safe. But there's the rub! This swamp cultivation is so uncertain, and these good prices are so doubtful, and—the d——l take these lawyers and merchants; they get everything at last!" And then he mused in silence, looking neither to the right nor left, as he went forward. Passing out of the open fields, he penetrated a dark avenue which ran through a dense and umbrageous swamp-forest, which formed, as it were, a boundary between the river-lands and uplands, and was crowded with an immense growth of cypress, ash, poplar, and pine—so densely arrayed that, though in midwinter, when all but the evergreens were stripped of foliage, the beams of the sun were seldom suffered to find entrance. The day being clouded, the darkness of this

region was still more oppressive, and a slight shiver shook the frame of our already desponding proprietor as he entered the narrow and dismal passage. At this moment an owl shrieked above him, a huge fowl, bald but horned, whose great human eyes and horrid screech might well disquiet, with unpleasant forebodings, the mood of one so circumstanced as our worthy planter. "How like," he exclaimed, "to the voice of Skinflint. I almost fancied at first that it was he crying out to me." He looked up as he spoke, and beheld the bird sitting upon a great limb almost overhead, and looking directly down upon him. He rode on, the little incident oppressing him unpleasantly, and much more than his pride was willing to admit. "Why does that fellow cross my fancy thus? What is he to me? What can he do? He can have no purpose but for his clients, and these may be satisfied—let the worst come to the worst—by a timely surrender of the property." But a second thought taught him not to lay this flattering unction to his soul. He had bought the Butler negroes at high, and the same sort of property was now selling at low prices. The loss must be large, and must be made up out of his own estates. Then the interest, then his own debts, which, to meet this interest, already had been suffered to grow to a heavy item! Altogether, the prospect was such that our proprietor of "Maize-in-milk" was only too happy to exclude the subject altogether from his thoughts. But this was not so easy, and his gloomy mood continued till he reached his dwelling, where, soon after, the contents of his mail gave it an

increase of sting and bitterness. "A letter from Mr. Skinflint," he remarked quietly to his wife, "in which he speaks of being here in three days. That must bring him here to-morrow. Let us see—the letter is dated the 12th. Yes, indeed, to-morrow we may look for him."

"What does *he* come for?" said the simple-hearted but shrewd mother, looking up at Bessy Clinton. The latter did not see the glance, and did not appear to hear the inquiry.

"You forget," said the colonel, "that he has the management of all the business of the Butler estate."

"Did you say that Mary Butler was coming, papa?"

"Not unless this letter says so, which I see comes from Bloomsdale, and is addressed to you."

Bessy Clinton received and read the epistle with eagerness. "There, mamma, it is from Mary, and she and her aunt both are coming, and will be here on Saturday."

"We shall have a full house, then, for Fergus Berkshire rode in this morning to say that his mother would be up from the city in three days, and would spend the Christmas with us."

The communication was received in grave silence; Colonel Openheart, his letters still in his hand, steadily watching the fire as flake by flake crumbled away into the mass below.

"We shall have a full house, Mr. Openheart," repeated the lady.

"Yes."

A pause.

"Why, husband, you seem to be in a dream!"

"Yes—yes, I hear."

"I am glad you do, for it is necessary that you should write at once for supplies for Christmas. The sugar is almost out; we must have several pounds of green tea, and perhaps a little black, for Mrs. Berkshire asked for it when she was here before. She has learned the use of it at the North, where I am told they drink no other kind. And raisins, and currants, and almonds, apples, and—"

We need not follow the good housekeeper through the catalogue. Our worthy proprietor was almost in despair, yet he subdued his feelings with great firmness and strength of will. Bessy Clinton alone perceived that something was wrong. Her eye perused the countenance of her father with a modest interest, that did not suffer him to see that he was watched. She saw that his face had grown somewhat paler than its wont. She had already remarked that he had grown thinner during the past few months, and she now fancied that his hair had put on a more snowy complexion. She saw and mused, but was properly silent. Colonel Openheart reopened one of the letters which he had just received. It was the polite request of his grocer that his account should be attended to. The sum total was set down, that there should be no mistake, $718 44; and here were wants which must increase it considerably, and no crop, and no means of payment, but by a great sacrifice of property.

"I wish there was no such season as Christmas."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Bessy Clinton, in reproachful accents, "how *can* you wish so?"

Mrs. Openheart looked up in surprise.

"At least," said the proprietor, "I may be permitted to wish that this Christmas were fairly over."

"What, papa, just when I am calculating upon this as the most merry Christmas of any that we have ever had!" and the sweet girl, as she spoke, had glided to the chair where her father sat, and with arm that circled his neck was bending round and looking up affectionately in his face. A slight moisture gathered in his eyes, which it was just possible for him to subdue.

"May you ever find it happy with you at Christmas, Bessy, and at all other seasons. God bless you, my dear child; you are of more comfort to me than all the others. But I can scarcely share with you in your delights this Christmas."

"And why not, papa?"

"You know that I have made no crop this year; there was a failure last year also, and another partial failure the year before, and my expenses have been very heavy. Bills must be paid, and—"

"Didn't I warn you of it, husband, when you would buy those Butler negroes?" said the good wife, with an exulting shake of the head and finger.

"Yes, Mrs. Openheart, you did," answered the husband, mildly, "but that was only after they were bought; and the question now is, not exactly as to your credit as a prophet, but to mine as a paymaster."

The sagacious lady felt the gentle rebuke and was silent.

"There are debts to be paid, Bessy Clinton," continued the father, affectionately, though sadly; "and this it is which makes me tremble even at the additional charges which this Christmas is to bring upon me."

"But our friends must be received with proper welcome, Colonel Openheart," said the lady.

"Oh, true," was the answer, as if it were a matter of course that certain appearances should be maintained even though at the sacrifice of everything; "true, true, your groceries shall be ordered, and we shall be prepared, I trust, to welcome with proper warmth every guest who may honor us with his presence—not forgetting that bird of evil aspect and voice, Richard Skinflint, Esq., himself. But I am afraid it will cost us greatly, and we must look to contract our expenses among ourselves, and make up in this way what our hospitality may dissipate. I will order what you desire. This year there shall be no changes. Merrie old Christmasse must visit the children, too, as usual; and, as we continue our own luxuries, the negroes must have theirs. The New Year must not be clouded to our inferiors because we are gloomy."

"But we shall not be gloomy, papa," said Bessy Clinton, twining herself about him and kissing his cheeks fondly. "This dark weather will disappear; hereafter you will have good seasons and good luck. Let me prophesy—me, Bessy Clinton, among the

prophets—that next year will be a famous crop year, prices high—"

"And grocers' low," was the somewhat sober conclusion of the father. "You are a good girl, Bessy, and I will probably remind you of your prophecy next Christmas, as your mother takes care to remind me of hers—that is, when they happen to be true. But what is here? Looking at Skinflint's letter and the grocer's, I have omitted one that would seem to be from Ned."

"From Ned?" exclaimed mother and daughter in the same breath.

"It looks like his hand, and is from New York. Sure enough, it is he. He reached New York on Friday last, in the Sylvie de Grasse, from Havre, and will be in Charleston by the Wilmington boat."

"When, papa, when?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow! Dear, dear Ned, how I long to see his face again."

The ejaculations of Bessy Clinton were sufficient for the rest. The mother's eyes were full of bright tears, and in the grateful thoughts of a favorite son arrived at home and manhood, the cares which troubled the father were temporarily forgotten.

The next day brought Skinflint. He was received with respect and kindness, if not cordiality; though neither our proprietor nor the worthy matron, his wife, beheld his coming with any satisfaction. The former could not forget that it was in the power of this man, with whom he could have no sympathies,

materially to impair his fortunes; and the latter had suspicions which never crossed her companion's mind, that Skinflint's eye was fixed upon her daughter with an expression which already denotes the foregone conclusion of the hawk, who sees, from his swing in air, where the partridge is about to nestle. Any notion that such was the passion of the attorney, never once troubled the thought of Colonel Openheart, whose pride of character could not for an instant tolerate the idea of any sympathies between a creature of such avid and selfish character and his purely-minded and generous child. But Mrs. Openheart said nothing of her conjectures, and the fears of her husband with regard to Skinflint were wholly of a different character. They rode out together a little while after the arrival of the latter, and crossed the cotton and cornfields in their route to the river. There was an unpleasant grin upon the lips of Skinflint as the mean appearance of the cotton stems denoted the complete failure of the crop. He had heard something of this before, enough to satisfy him that things were going on as he wished them. A southern planter is apt to be suspicious of your comments when he is conscious that his crop is obviously inferior, and the eye of Colonel Openheart was soon sensible of the expression on the countenance of Skinflint.

"Not much cotton here this year, colonel," said he, switching his boot as they rode.

"*None*, sir, none, as you may see," was the sudden, almost sharp reply.

"Hum!" A pause. "How is your corn crop, colonel?"

"Turn your horse's head with mine, and you shall answer your own question."

They rode aside to other fields. The corn-stalks, low and slender, told their own story of a blight quite as great as that in the cotton field.

"Why, colonel, you will hardly make enough to do you at this rate."

"Shall have to buy a thousand bushels at least, sir," responded the other, almost fiercely.

Skinflint knew the fact a month before, but it was the nature of the creature to extort the acknowledgment of the sufferer, by making him lay bare his sore as frequently as possible, though at each effort he tore away some portion of the skin.

"And corn already seventy cents," was the muttered commentary of the executor.

"Seventy-*five* here," was the stern correction which the proprietor interposed.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Skinflint; "then in three weeks more it will be a dollar."

"Possibly *two*, sir," was the second moody amendment.

"Scarcely, colonel," was the speculative suggestion of the attorney. "Prices here, whenever they pass beyond a certain point, bring in competition from other quarters. Here, sellers must be governed by some regard to the Charleston market, which in turn takes its color from the extent of the crops in Maryland and North Carolina. Now, as the crops this

year in these two States have been of average character, it follows that the article will scarcely exceed eighty cents in Charleston. Allow for the cost of each transition and freight by railroad or wagon, and you must see that it can by no possibility exceed one dollar here, unless with reference to some very great scarcity. I don't think, all things considered, that you will have to give more than a dollar, though it may possibly, in two months more, go two-eighths above it, particularly as I suppose that none of your neighbors have done better than yourself."

"You mistake, sir; few of them but have done better."

"Indeed! But that is very unfortunate! But you have past seasons to rely upon, colonel. You have made good crops heretofore, and can very well afford to contend with the evils of the present."

"Unfortunately, sir, I have no such source of consolation. This is the third, though the worst by far, of three successive failures."

"Indeed! But suffer me to ask, Colonel Openheart, to what do you ascribe these failures?"

"Why, sir, I do not see what good can possibly arise to either of us from the inquiry. Perhaps the shortest way would be to adopt the suggestion of my neighbors, and to assume that all the mischief lay in the incapacity of the proprietor."

An audible "hem!" answered this cold conclusion, which shut the door upon any farther annoyance from this score at least, and a somewhat protracted silence followed, broken at length by Colonel Openheart,

whose mind had been gradually steeled by the tone, manner, and comments of his companion, to a resolute approach to the very subject which, over all, he most dreaded and could have wished to avoid. It was with something of desperation, therefore, that he himself opened the business of his debt to the estate of Butler.

"I take for granted, Mr. Skinflint, that there can be no reason why, in the present condition of my affairs, I should not have every indulgence from Messrs. Ingelhart and Cripps. Miss Butler is still a minor, and the investment is notoriously safe. I am aware that the entire payment is now due, but it must be evident to you that in the failure of my crops, and the low prices of cotton for the last three years, so large a payment was impossible except at great sacrifice of property. Besides, as you are aware, the negroes were bought at very high prices."

"Quite too high," said Skinflint, with some gravity, well remembering that but for the generous impulse of Openheart, he would have had them at his own prices. The recollection did not make him more accessible to the suggestions of the proprietor. "There may be some difficulty about the matter; and I am free to confess, Colonel Openheart, that your own statement holds forth nothing encouraging to a creditor, particularly in such a case as ours, where we represent the interests of a minor. The investment may be safe at present, but when you speak of a failure of three crops in succession, upon the successful making of which your only chance of payment depends, we are a little disquieted. Another failure diminishes

our securities, and necessarily increases your responsibility to other creditors, and the game may finally depend upon the degree of speed which the creditor may make in securing the stakes."

Openheart winced at this cool suggestion, but he had to control his emotions. The matter was one simply of business, and he felt that he had nothing to do but put aside all the sensibilities—quite unnecessary in such a case and with such a companion—of the gentleman. He answered quietly, though it tasked some effort to do so: "But the property is always there, secured by mortgage, which you may foreclose at any moment."

"But the property may not be always there."

"How, sir?"

"It is a perishable property; and your real estates, which are the collateral securities, may be subject to the more perfect liens of other creditors. Besides, sir, negroes are falling in value, and the foreclosure of mortgage at this moment may be of vast importance even to your own safety, since the probabilities are that they will bring much better prices now—though still far less than when you bought—than they would twelve months hence."

"Am I to understand from this, Mr. Skinflint, that your instructions are to foreclose if payment be not now made?"

"By no means, sir. What I say, is simply to suggest some of the difficulties in the way of a decision at this moment. I must reflect on the condition of affairs, and will communicate with my clients."

"It is understood, Mr. Skinflint, that you have the entire confidence of Messrs. Ingelhart and Cripps, and that your opinion will be almost certain to determine their conduct?"

"I flatter myself," replied the attorney, with a mixed expression of meekness and complacency, "that I am not wholly without my influence over the minds of those gentlemen. But you will permit me to ask, Colonel Openheart, with what purpose your remark is made?"

"Surely, sir, my purpose was a very simple one; it was only that I might express the hope that your dealings with me, and your knowledge of my affairs, were such as would enable you to assure your clients of the undoubted security which they possess, collaterally, for the bonds which they hold of mine in behalf of the estate of Butler."

The lawyer looked grave for a moment, then smiling and turning round to his companion with an air of great amenity and frankness: "Colonel Openheart, it may be that I shall find it equally my pleasure and my interest to serve you in this manner. I think it likely, sir, that I shall have to seek a favor at your hands before I leave you. Now, sir, one good turn deserves another, and—"

"A favor at my hands, Mr. Skinflint? And, pray, what is it?"

"Excuse me, sir; not just now. Sufficient for the day, &c. Excuse me; not yet; not yet! Meanwhile, sir, if you please, we will suspend the conversation on this subject."

The manner of Skinflint struck our proprietor unpleasantly. Without question, Colonel Openheart was an aristocrat; and the familiar, very frank, and friendly tones of his companion, were decidedly more grating upon his ears than the keen, avid utterance of the calculating and selfish man of business. They made him uneasy for a moment, as he could not possibly divine in what way he was expected to requite the service of the attorney. He was relieved when he recollected that Skinflint had lately bought a plantation in his neighborhood, and, being a lawyer, naturally looked to fill some seat either in Congress or the legislature. The large influence of Colonel Openheart was unquestionable, and he now worried himself with asking if he could conscientiously support such a person. But the adage of which Skinflint had reminded him, and which is always a favorite one with those who recoil from trouble, determined him to dismiss the evil to the day when it must come up; and thus satisfied, our colonel readily complied with the evident desires of his companion to canter off in the direction of the dwelling.

They left the fields, accordingly, after a ten minutes' ride, and took their way out into one of the main roads of the country. They were scarcely entered upon this, when they encountered Bessy Clinton and Fergus Berkshire, on horseback, emerging from one of the long and lonely avenues leading out into the pine lands. Could Colonel Openheart have seen the scowl that showed itself upon Skinflint's brow at this unexpected meeting? The two young people rode

slowly, and seemed totally absorbed in their own affairs. There was an evident flush upon the face of Bessy Clinton, while the cheeks of Fergus seemed rather pale than otherwise. The parties exchanged greetings, and while the colonel and his companion walked their horses, the youth and damsel gave their steeds a free rein, and were soon out of sight in the direction of the dwelling.

"A good-looking young fellow, that," said Skinflint, with some natural cleverness. "But ours is not an age of industry and exertion; and once give a fellow a chance with plenty of money on foreign travel, and you may be sure that all's over with him. I have good reason to believe that young Berkshire made a monstrous hole in his own and mother's capital when he was abroad. His dissipation while in Paris was said to be notorious."

"Said by whom, Mr. Skinflint?"

"Oh, by everybody. The thing was all over town when he first came home from Europe."

"Town is a famous place for scandal, Mr. Skinflint, and 'they say' is a proverbial liar. I know nothing of Berkshire's doings while abroad *except while he was in Paris*, and there my son Edward happened to be with him during his whole stay. Edward speaks of him *there* as a close and eager student of the language, the country, and the fine arts. I very much doubt if the charge of dissipation was ever less properly made than against Fergus. He shows no traces of it now; and, indeed, by his general intelligence, equal readiness and modesty, and large acquisition of facts, he

shows that he could have employed but little time in excesses, or his intellectual gains must have come by instinct. As for his expenditures—but it may be that your profession has brought you to a knowledge of straits in the family with which I am unfamiliar, and I must not oppose my conjectures to your facts. Still, I cannot persuade myself that either he or his mother is in any difficulty."

"Nor do I say it. I have no knowledge of their affairs myself, but it was said they would probably have to put down the city establishment, and retire wholly upon the country."

"Said probably by those who speak rather from their wishes than their wit. Mrs. Berkshire, while a very liberal and lofty-minded woman, is yet a very prudent one. She has, I think, trained her son very admirably, and—"

"All that may be, Colonel Openheart, but the best of training will not always or often secure our children against the temptations of a new sphere and an intoxicating novelty in society."

"*Always*, sir; good training will always secure the young against any temptation. But the question is as to the quality of training. What is *good* and what is *bad* training is hardly settled yet among philosophers. It certainly is not among parents and schoolmasters, who seem to me to pride themselves most upon their system where the regimen is the very worst."

"You may be right, sir, and I am not prepared to discuss a mere abstraction; but though this young

man's education may have been as you think it, still the exception is possible, you know; and while such are the reports in the city, *if I were a father*, I should be very jealous of the familiarity of any such person with a daughter of mine."

Colonel Openheart half wheeled his horse, about to survey the speaker. "Really, Mr. Skinflint, I have reason to thank you for your counsel, and so has my family; but, believe me, we have none of us any apprehensions either from the vices of Fergus Berkshire or the weaknesses of my daughter. *Her training*, at least, has been such that we can confide everything to her delicacy; which, in the case of women, is the best security for their discretion. Still, sir, I thank you; I thank you."

There was something in the tone and manner of Colonel Openheart, that warned Mr. Skinflint he had ventured a little too far.

"Pardon me, Colonel Openheart," he said, quickly, "but I meant not to advise. My remark was purely general, and did not specially relate to your case. This young man may be a very good young man. *Of my own knowledge*, I can say nothing against him."

"Can you upon the knowledge of any other person? If you can, Mr. Skinflint, you shall see that I am as vigilant in the protection of my fireside as any man in the country."

"Why no, sir, not upon the *knowledge* of any one in particular; but what is said by many, sir, places the matter said in that category, which, among legal

men, constitutes a proverbial notoriety, and such is not supposed to need proving."

"Good law, no doubt, but most awful morality! Can you mention, among those who deal in this *notoriety*, one person who professes to speak from his own knowledge?"

"No; I am not sure that I can."

"Then I think that we may safely venture to dismiss the story, since the truth that no man will father is very apt to prove a falsehood. Your law rule, which rejects all hearsay testimony, will justify our irreverence."

We need not pursue the dialogue, which Skinflint, confident as he usually was, could not but see had terminated to his disadvantage. His tone was judiciously lowered, though without lessening any of the unfavorable impressions which his companion had contrived to form of his character and heart. Our proprietor treated him, however, with a peculiar civility, the stateliness of which, as it kept him at a distance without affording him definite cause of resentment, was sufficiently irksome, and he longed in his heart to have an opportunity to punish the patrician for the privilege which he exercised, being an honest man, of behaving fearlessly like one. It was the error of Skinflint to suppose that, having shown Colonel Openheart that he was somewhat in his power, he had acquired the right to prescribe to him in moral and social respects. He was soon made to see that there were some personal barriers which not even his legal and moneyed strength would enable him to break

down. The character which is well grounded upon principle and well trained by habit, never yields in any misfortune, never succumbs to any condition, though these may menace every social and domestic security that we possess.

At dinner, Colonel Openheart was the hospitable landholder; that noble old English character which we do not sufficiently value, but which is the source of England's best securities. He seemed to forget that he had cause of apprehension or annoyance, and the ease, the dignity, the grace with which he presided, the perpetual watchfulness, that saw that no one remained unsupplied, these all served to extort from the secret thought of Skinflint a wholesome wonder as to the source of so much equilibrium. Dinner was late, and with night came the mail, bringing a hurried letter from Edward, which our proprietor, for reasons of his own, and with (for him) unwonted circumspection, forbore to read aloud. This letter told him of the young man's safe arrival in Charleston, and of his intention to be *en route* for the plantation in another day. Was it the postscript which informed the father that it was the writer's purpose to take Bloomsdale in his way, and if possible bring Mary Butler and her aunt along with him, that kept him from reading it aloud?

The two gentlemen sat up late. We did not mention that Fergus Berkshire did not stay to supper, but left the company as soon as dinner was over, with an apology, in which he pleaded necessary business. He ceased to be the subject of Skinflint's comment, but

the occasional glance of the latter, as the youth engaged the attention of Bessy Clinton, did not escape the eyes of the vigilant mother. The intimacy between the young man and the maiden seemed to disturb the equilibrium of the attorney, and probably rendered him much more precipitate than he would have been in a matter which, as he sat with Colonel Openheart that night—the family having retired—he proceeded to bring up. We will not adopt his language, the substance of which was a formal proposal from him, Richard Skinflint, attorney at law, for the hand in wedlock of the fair maiden, Bessy Clinton Openheart. Many long speeches, circuitously conceived and cumbrously worded, prefaced this offer. Colonel Openheart looked upon the speaker with unmitigated astonishment; but he was prudent, kept his temper and his secret, and calmly answered the lawyer, that he, Skinflint, should be permitted an interview in the morning with his daughter, and hear his answer from her own lips. Skinflint said something in reply to this in approbation of the excellent custom prevailing in certain countries, where the parents adjusted among themselves the contracts of marriage, and the young people were sufficiently dutiful to submit. But Colonel Openheart's reply was brief and to the purpose. His daughter must determine for herself in a matter so vital to her own happiness. The night passed over with due rapidity. The morning brought breakfast and the promised interview. Conducting his daughter to the library, he instructed her to await the coming of Mr. Skinflint,

and to give becoming ear to his communications. The latter was apprised that the damsel was in waiting, and with something more of flurry and agitation than ever troubled him in his ordinary practice, he stole half on tiptoe into the designated apartment. How he purred and prabbled, with what studied and formal phrase he proceeded to a declaration, in which, if the heart be only warm and faithful, the lips may bungle and the tongue falter without dread of censure or ridicule, we will not say. Enough that his proposals, when Bessy Clinton fully understood them, were quite as confounding to that damsel as they were to her father. We need scarcely say that they met with ready rejection. What a blind thing is selfishness! Here, now, was a person of great worldly shrewdness, singularly sagacious in common business transactions, yet blundering with the inconceivable notion that he could possibly prevail with youth, beauty, tenderness, and the most generous and confiding faith. Taught by selfishness to regard wealth as the only power, he had forgotten that such subjects as affection, duty, taste, sweetness, and grace, must always acknowledge far different authorities. It was impossible for sweet Bessy Clinton to be unkind or harsh, and though greatly surprised, if not indignant, at the proposal, she replied with gentleness: She was sorry that Mr. Skinflint had set his heart—his heart!—on his handmaid, but really the thing was out of the question. She was very grateful, but begged respectfully to be excused. Do not suppose that there was any mocking in her response. The irony is wholly ours. His

pill was quite as much sweetened as it well could be, but was still such as he found it difficult to swallow. He would have argued the case, as he recovered his courage, precisely as he would have done before a jury, in the matter of cow and calf, in trespass or replevin—and did argue it. The damsel heard him quietly to the end, and affirmed the previous verdict. He hurried to Colonel Openheart, as to a court of appeal, but the colonel disclaimed jurisdiction; and ordering his horses, with fury but ill concealed, Skinflint prepared to take his departure before dinner. With genuine politeness, regarding the circumstances, our proprietor did not urge him to delay. With nice and delicate consideration, he complied with his wishes, conversed with him without reserve and with studied kindness, but studiously forbore any absurd, apologetic, or sympathetic discourses. The parties separated on good terms, Skinflint shaking his host's hand warmly, and smiling in his face affectionately as he took his departure; but ere he was well out of sight, he shook his hand menacingly back upon the habitation, and swore, in muttered accents, through his closed teeth, a bitter oath of vengeance. Our proprietor knew enough of the person to apprehend that he had made a fast enemy, but he remembered the proverb, and put off his regrets and sorrows, as well as he might, to the day of evil that should compel them.

We pass over three days, and still Edward had not arrived. "He is sick in Charleston," said the anxious mother. "He is at Bloomsdale," said the more

knowing daughter. "He is spending time and money, wherever he is," said the dissatisfied father, "instead of being at his law." The fourth day brought the truant, as an escort to Mrs. St. Clair and Mary Butler. He had been delayed at Bloomsdale at the requisition of the ladies, and the excuse was readily received by the parents, particularly as it was urged by a tall, handsome, and well-bred youth, more than six feet high, admirably proportioned, and carrying himself like a prince of the blood royal. The father forgot his troubles as he saw his own youth restored and reflected in his son. He was not suffered to forget them long. That very evening brought him a letter from Skinflint, as the attorney for Ingelhart and Cripps.

"Sense of duty, &c. Foreclosure of mortgage, &c. Unavoidable, &c. Very sorry, &c.

"With sentiments of profound respect, &c.

(*Signed,*) "RICHARD SKINFLINT."

The proprietor crumpled the graceless epistle in his palm, and hurled it into the fire. The wife alone saw the act. The young people were busy around the evening table, examining a world of curiosities which Edward had brought home from Europe. They little knew of the bitterness that dashed the cup of joy even while it was at the old father's lips. He uttered no sigh, no word. He would not cloud the happiness of that youthful circle. He resolved upon the exercise of all his manhood. Taking his hat, he went forth into the night. It was a lovely starlight. The skies were never more thickly studded with the

saintly watchers, and all were bright and beautiful as if they had never felt a cloud. He walked down the noble avenue of oaks and cedars towards the high road. Ere he reached the gateway, a vehicle dashed by in considerable haste, which he recognized as that of Skinflint. This person was also a proprietor, and planted only a few miles distant. Though not a resident at his place, for his professional duties in the city would not suffer this, he yet contrived occasionally to visit his plantation, where, when not the guest of his neighbors, he was of his overseer. The angry feeling in Colonel Openheart's breast was strongly excited as he detected the carriage of his enemy. He himself remained unseen in the shadow of the ancestral trees, but he clearly discerned the head of Skinflint as he thrust it forth for examination while passing the avenue of the man whom he now fondly thought to victimize. Colonel Openheart conjectured his thoughts, and the fierce idea rose in his mind of a deadly grapple with the scoundrel. Had they met on foot or on horseback in the high road, it had been scarcely possible, in the present mood of our proprietor, to have forborne inflicting some indignity upon the base and malignant creature. But he passed, never dreaming that Openheart was so near. Had he fancied it, his head had never shown itself from the carriage window.

We must hurry over a week in order to realize the more important events in our narrative. We are again on the threshold of Father Chrystmasse. Our lady proprietor at "Maize-in-milk" has received the necessary supplies from the grocer. The hogs are

killed, the mince-pies are made, and the usual guests, invited and uninvited, are already pouring in. The songs of Bessy Clinton and Mary Butler are ringing through the dwelling, and every customary chorus, gathered from the early poets in tribute to the season, has been employed to guide the merry damsels in the decoration of mantel, and mirror, and window, and to cheer them in the prosecution of their pretty tasks. For a week beforehand the dance was continued nightly in the great hall. There were now Fergus Berkshire and Edward Openheart, and one or more of the latter's old acquaintances, to say nothing of neighboring maidens just rising into womanhood, whom the hospitalities of "Maize-in-milk" had brought together. Two days before Christmas, John and William made their appearance from college; and Tom Openheart, now a lad of twelve, and very tall for his age, was permitted to add to the strength of the company, in regard to the interests of certain of the damsels who were about his own age. Altogether, the auspices were particularly favorable to the sports of the young. Our ancient friends, Jones, Whipple, Whitfield, Bond and daughter, and good old father Kinsale —who in growing older did not seem to have grown a jot more feeble than he was twenty years before— also came with the day preceding Christmas, and wore their pleasantest aspects. But the weather had a cold forbidding complexion still, and our proprietor found it difficult to keep from his own visage the doubts and apprehensions which were working in his mind. At this moment a stranger rode into the inclosure, who

proved to be the sheriff of the district. He declared his purpose very civilly, regretted the necessity under which he was placed, showed his credentials, and would receive either the money on the bond, or the negroes. There was no remedy; Colonel Openheart submitted with simple fortitude. The negroes were at the sheriff's service. He excused himself to his guests, and accompanied the officer to the negro-quarter.

"But why not wait till sale day, sir?" was the inquiry of Colonel Openheart. "They shall then be forthcoming."

The officer hesitated, but at length remarked: "I should do so cheerfully, sir, having myself every confidence in your honor; but I have been counselled that I shall be held rigidly responsible unless the levy is at once made, as some reason exists for suspecting that your son will be employed to *run* the negroes to Texas."

"By whom, sir, has this intimation been given?"

"By Mr. Skinflint, acting for Ingelhart and Cripps."

"The scoundrel! But I have no more to say. Make your levy."

The negroes were by this time assembled, and listening with eager anxiety.

"You must go, my people," said the proprietor, addressing them with a voice which his emotions hardly suffered to be articulate; "you must go, I cannot help it. I would have saved you, but cannot. I have done for you all I could; I can do no more!"

He turned away to conceal his emotion, and hurried into the neighboring woods. The strong man wept like a child as the loud outcries and lamentations of the slaves still pursued him. He had been to them a father and a benefactor, had watched them in sickness, and indulged them with moderate tasks when well. As he thought upon the parting, he recovered all his strength. He came forth, and said to the sheriff: "You will bring them up to the house?"

"Why, sir," said the officer, with considerate sensibility, "I had proposed taking them through the woods. It would mortify you before your guests."

"I thank you, sir," was the respectful but proud answer; "I thank you, but I must request that you will bring them to the dwelling before you depart. I have something to bestow upon them. My guests will know all before long, and may as well hear it at once.

The negroes were brought accordingly.

"You see, my friends, I have some troubles for my Christmas. They are rather new to me in my old age, but it is probable that I shall become familiar with them before I die."

Something more was said, enough to show that our proprietor, in his unaffected grief, had lost nothing of his manliness. He proceeded to open the cases in which the Christmas presents were kept. These were not to have been given till the ensuing day, but this delay would have deprived the Butler negroes of their share of gifts. With hasty hand our proprietor bestowed his wares.

"Now take them, Mr. Sheriff, as quickly as you

please, so that our young people may not see them. They are down the road, and if you pursue *that* path, you will escape them. Good-morning, sir, good-morning," and the speaker retired among his guests. He maintained his courage manfully, was once more the courtly and considerate host, still solicitous of the wants and wishes of the meanest, until, some two hours having elapsed, an uproar without drew attention to the windows. What was the surprise of Col. Openheart to see all the negroes returned, and to find them quite clamorous in the publication of their delight that they were not to lose their present master. One of their number presented himself with a letter, which our proprietor opened with no little curiosity, for as yet nothing had been got from the negroes, by reason of the multitude of voices, which threw any or much light upon the mystery. The letter was from young Berkshire. We give it without curtailment.

"Dear Sir: Meeting with the sheriff, and being in want of a sufficient force for my Cedar Island plantation, I have ventured to assume your bond, with interest, being perfectly satisfied to pay the same price for the negroes at which you bought them. As I hold them to be amply worth the amount, I leave it entirely with yourself to retain them, if you please, paying me at your leisure; though I should prefer to have them, on my assumption of your several responsibilities in regard to this property. Whatever may be your decision, which

you can make at your leisure, it will at least be proper that they should remain in your keeping until after the holidays. Very faithfully, and with great respect, I am, my dear sir,

"Your obliged friend and servant,

"FERGUS M. BERKSHIRE."

Colonel Openheart had not a word to say. The act was so handsome, that he at once gave the letter into the hands of old Kinsale, who read it twice aloud to the company. The proprietor went out to the negroes, and sent them back happy to their habitations. The young people soon after made their appearance. They had heard something of the matter, and Edward Openheart, as soon as all the facts were made known to him, at once rode over to Berkshire's to give him his own and the thanks of the family.

"Tell him, Ned, that he shall have the negroes, and tell him what you please besides, from your own heart."

Such was all the message of the father. Berkshire looked somewhat anxious when the young man paused.

"Do you bring any letter, Ned?"

"No."

"No message from anybody?"

"None but that from my father. What do you expect?"

"Nay, never mind; you will hear soon enough."

The young man seemed dull and disappointed, and

was not easily persuaded to give a detailed account of his fortunate interposition to arrest the departure of the sheriff with the property. His narrative was briefly to the effect that, having occasion to ride a few miles up the road, he had suddenly, on his return, encountered the troop, with the sheriff and Skinflint at their head. The former had been summoned to the house of the latter, where he had stayed the last night, and they had gone out together the next day on their official mission immediately after breakfast, Skinflint waiting some four miles off for the return of the officer. He had timed his proceedings with the basest cunning and malevolence. He knew that "Maize-in-milk" was crowded with guests and neighbors, and that the pride of the proprietor would be touched to the quick by such a humiliating exposure as that which he meditated. He had not anticipated the issue. Fergus Berkshire met the party even while Skinflint was receiving from the sheriff a description of what had taken place. The exulting grin had not passed from his features as Fergus drew nigh. A few words sufficed to put him in possession of all the facts.

"I will assume this obligation," he said to the officer, by whom he was well known.

"Costs, interest, &c.?" said Skinflint.

"I will assume them all."

"It must be in writing," muttered Skinflint.

"Very good, sir."

The sheriff produced the papers with which the providence of the lawyer had furnished him, and a

pocket-inkstand-and pen enabled Berkshire to prepare and sign an adequate obligation, under the instructions of Skinflint himself, with which he had to confess himself satisfied. No unnecessary words passed between the parties.

"Go home to your master, good people," said Berkshire to the negroes. The sheriff he asked to dine with him; to Skinflint he bowed, and bade good-morning.

"The rascal!" exclaimed Ned Openheart; "if I had him under my horsewhip! But, dear Fergus, you will go back with me to 'Maize-in-milk?'"

"Not to-day, Ned," said the other, somewhat sadly.

"To-night, then?"

"No; you must excuse me, but I have good reasons for not visiting your house to-day."

"Pshaw! you fear that we shall be thanking you, and all that sort of thing, but I promise you on my honor we shall say nothing about it."

Berkshire was firm, and Ned rode away, somewhat wondering what had so suddenly come over the fellow. The mystery was explained as soon as he got home. Sweet Bessy Clinton had seized the first moment, when she could divert her father from his guests, to place before his eyes a written proposal from Fergus Berkshire for her hand, and to throw herself in tearful silence upon the old man's neck.

"And when did you get this, Bessy Clinton?"

"Last night, sir."

"And what do *you* say, Bessy?"

"Oh, father, I *do* think Mr. Berkshire is an honorable gentleman."

"I agree with you, Bessy; and were I you, I would certainly accept his offer."

"Thanks, dear father, thanks."

"Well, my child, go and write to him yourself. He deserves it."

Fergus Berkshire *did* come to "Maize-in-milk" that night.

If Richard Skinflint found himself discomfited so unexpectedly that day, the next, which was Christmas, brought him new sources of disquiet, and new mortifications, in a communication from Mrs. St. Clair, advising him that her niece had accepted the hand of Mr. Edward Openheart, and that the marriage was arranged to take place the ensuing May. "As this event," said the letter, "is the contingency upon which her minority determines, and as I have yielded my consent to the contract, which was the sole condition coupled with this contingency, it will be necessary that Messrs. Ingelhart and Cripps should be prepared for the settlement with the future protector of the heiress in anticipation of the expected event."

Skinflint did not sleep that night—nor, for that matter, did several of our parties; but the provocation to wakefulness among them was the result of very different feelings. At "Maize-in-milk" there was now no check to the happiness of all the circle. The revolution was complete. The horizon was no longer overcast. The moon and stars were all out. Instead of the shrieks of the owl, a mock-bird sang at the window,

and the cheek of our proprietor grew warm, and his face lightened as the several couples wheeled gayly in the great hall in the mazes of the dance; the tear of joy gathered brightly in his eye, and he murmured to his placid spouse, half unconsciously, "Thank God, it is a happy Christmas after all!"

THE END.

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